

Tàijíquán – True to the Art

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my late Teacher Huang Sheng Shyan, who imparted to me the knowledge of the art of Tàijíquán.

All my students, whom accompany me on my journey of taijiquan, pointing out to scenery that I might have missed.

To my wife, Janice (Siah Ait Tiang), sons Andy Wee Inn Siang, Louis Wee Inn Tze, Jamie Wee Inn Zheng, and Francis Wee Inn Yu, all of whom support me in my journey.

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1. The Quality of *Tàijíquán* Today

The founder of Yi Chuan, teacher Wang Shen Cai, once commented that the quality of *Tàijíquán* today has gone downhill and that he hopes one day a practitioner will be able to restore it to its former standard and glory. Of course, most *Tàijí* practitioners are offended by his comment, but I do not think that he is arrogant in his remark as there will not be a reaction without an action. Li Ya Xuan, a senior student of Yang Cheng Fu of whom Cheng Man Ching spoke highly, said that ninety-nine per cent of *Tàijí* practitioners practice incorrectly. Unlike Wang Shen Cai, he gave the reason, he said it is because they do not follow the *Tàijí* classics in their practice. Looking into the *Tàijí* circle today, we will find that his comment is justified and, instead of being offended, we should look at the causes and find a remedy for them, as it is the duty of every *Tàijí* practitioner to improve the quality of *Tàijíquán*.

Tàijíquán was brought out of the Chen village by Yang Lu Chang, the founder of the Yang style and it was propagated throughout China by his grandson Yang Cheng Fu, and Wu Chien Chuan the founder of the Wu style. It was then brought out of China to other parts of Asia, America and Europe by Tung Ying Chieh, Cheng Man Ching, Wu Kung Yi and their students.

In the late nineteen sixties, seventies and the eighties, the government of mainland China began the mass promotion of *Tàijíquán* in order to promote health among its population. Various different *Tàijí* forms were created based on movements from the traditional styles. In most of these new forms the movements were simplified, and it was done by people who had no in-depth understanding of *Tàijíquán*. Their movements were based on the beauty of the performance rather than the principles of *Tàijíquán*. We just have to look at *Tàijí* competitions, when

all the ‘champions’ are performing their *Tàijí* form it looks more like a dance than *Tàijíquán*.

The present day *Tàijí* could be divided into five categories:-

1. *Tàijí Exercise* - This is commonly found in municipal parks in Asia, but it also includes people anywhere in the world that do the *Tàijí* form as a movement without any *Tàijí* principles within it. Although it is better than taking no exercise at all, it is definitely not *Tàijíquán*.
2. *Tàijí Dance* -This is the, so called, *Tàijíquán* promoted by the Wushu Federation in China and Wushu Organisation outside China. It has beautiful movements and posture, the movement flows like a dance (occasionally the practitioners pause the performance at a beautiful posture for the audience to take photographs) but it does not have any *Tàijí* principles in it. Most of the so-called *Tàijí* champions in *wushu* competitions fall into this category.
3. *Holy Tàijí* - This is most commonly found in the West, where the teacher who has practiced other forms of meditation combines them with *Tàijí* form. While neglecting the *Tàijí* principles, they make yin and yang into something mystical and bring other spiritual practices into it. The teachers in this category often promote ‘guru worship’ and in this group you often find ‘gurus’ and ‘followers’, rather than teachers and students.
4. *Tàijí gōngfū* -These are mainly practitioners of other internal and external martial arts that have taken up *Tàijí*. Although they are practicing the *Tàijí* form, they talk about the principles but never apply them. When it comes to the application in pushing-hands they only use the techniques of the other arts they have learned and discard completely the *Tàijí* principles.
5. *Tàijíquán* - In this category the practitioners study and investigate the classics of *Tàijí* diligently. They put every principle of *Tàijí* in their *Tàijí* forms and pushing-hands, are always looking deeper into the principles and follow the traditional way of teaching and learning. Usually, regardless of what style of *Tàijí* they are, they only stick to one style and system and pursue the *Tàijí* principles and Dao through their life. Sadly this category makes up a very small percentage of *Tàijí* practitioners.

Taking the Journey into the Art of *Tàijíquán*

Before embarking on a journey into the art of *Tàijíquán*, one should understand the difference between *Tàijí* and other martial arts. *Tàijí* is not only a martial art; it is also an exercise for health and a philosophy of life. There are many other exercises which focus on developing the physical body, but neglect to train the mind, and there are meditations which focus on developing the mind but not the body. As an exercise *Tàijí* develops (cultivates) both the mind and the body. Although yoga also develops both the mind and body, unlike *Tàijí*, yoga is not a martial art.

The philosophy of *Tàijí* is based on the I Ching (The book of Changes) and its application as a martial art is similar to The Art of War by Sun Tze.

It is perhaps as a martial art that *Tàijíquán* really stands out from the others. The commonly understood concepts in martial arts, and generally in human thinking are that: the strong overcomes the weak, the fast overcomes the slow, the hard overcomes the soft, and we use brute force and resistance against an incoming force. In the practice of *Tàijíquán* the emphasis is on the weak overcoming the strong, the slow overcoming the fast, the soft overcoming the hard, using the mind and not brute force and when there is a force, then yielding to it. Because in *Tàijíquán* the emphasis is totally the opposite of what one would normally (habitually) do, the practitioners and would-be practitioners of *Tàijíquán* must not use a conventional mind-set and methods to understand and train it. This is most obvious when novices, other martial artists, and even many *Tàijí* practitioners watch a video of great *Tàijí* masters bouncing people off to a great distance with both feet of these people off the ground, and they comment that it is fake. That is because they only use a conventional mind-set to understand *Tàijíquán*. While other martial arts rely on speed and strength (brute force), *Tàijíquán* relies on skill and wisdom. When most martial art practitioners pass their mid forties they start to go downhill, but a *Tàijíquán* practitioner’s skill continues to refine and it is unhindered by age. It truly deserves the name *Tàijíquán*, translated as the “Supreme Ultimate Fist”, which can only be practiced using wisdom (mind) not brawn (brute force).

2. The Road Map to the Hall of *Tàijíquán*

When driving in an unfamiliar city, we need a road map to guide us to our destination so that we don't drive in circles and miss our destination. Similarly, in the practice of *Tàijíquán* there are sets of *Tàijí* Classic (principles of *Tàijíquán*) to guide us into 'the hall of *Tàijíquán*'. What has caused the level of *Tàijí* to deteriorate to such a state that prompted Wang Shen Cai and Li Ya Xuan to make such a negative comment?

Most *Tàijí* practitioners of today are oblivious to the existence of the *Tàijí* classics. Some of them may know that in *Tàijí* you must be upright, relaxed and use the hips to turn, but these are only a small part of the principles. Others talk about the principles but do not put them into practice.

The learning of *Tàijíquán* and the studying of the *Tàijí* classics must go hand in hand, right from the beginning. You do not learn the *Tàijí* movements of the form and then try to look for the principles in the movements. On the contrary, you should read the classics and when you practice the *Tàijí* form, *put* the principles *into* the movements. This raises the question of *how* we put the principles into the movements, and the answer is also found within the classics. In The Song of The Thirteen Postures it says "The flow of the *qì* and the mind are the emperor (commander), the flesh and bones (physical body) are the subjects". When the emperor gives the order, the subject must obey and, if the emperor does not give the order, the subject will not know what to do. Therefore during the practice of the *Tàijí* form the mind must ask and the body must respond. Whichever principle the mind 'asks for' at a given moment, the body must respond to it. After prolonged practice it will become a habit and become natural.

It is more than a matter of simply reading the *Tàijí* classics; as practitioners we must study them carefully and ask ourselves what each of the classics is trying to tell us. The interesting thing about the *Tàijí* classics is that our own understanding of the same sentence will evolve and change as we progress to a different level, and sometimes the meaning could become the complete opposite of what was understood previously. In the practice of *Tàijíquán*, there will be certain things you may have listened to or looked at, but if you are not at that level then you won't really hear or see. You can only say that you understand the principles if your body can experience it, otherwise your understanding is only theoretical. Even when your body and mind can experience a principle, you should always ask yourself if you can further refine it. Only then can one continue to refine; for if one has the attitude of "I've got it" then one will stop progressing.

Regardless of the apparent differences between various styles of *Tàijíquán*, they are all based on the same sets of *Tàijí* classics, which are:

- 1) Chang San-Feng *Tàijí* Classic
- 2) Wang Ts'ung-Yueh *Tàijí* Classic
- 3) The Song of Thirteen Postures
- 4) The Understanding of the Thirteen Postures
- 5) The Song of *Tuīshǒu* (Pushing-hands)
- 6) The Song of Substance and Function (by Cheng Man Ching).
- 7) Important *Tàijí* Points from the Yang family (for Yang Style practitioners)

太極拳論

1. 一舉動，周身俱要輕靈，
尤須貫串。
2. 氣宜鼓盪，神宜內斂。
3. 無使有缺陷處。
無使有凹凸處。
無使有斷續處。
4. 其根在腳，發於腿。
主宰於腰，形於手指。
由腳而腿而腰，總須完整一氣。
5. 向前退後，乃能得機得勢。
有不得機得勢處，身便散亂。
其病必於腰腿求之。
6. 上下前後左右皆然。
凡此皆是意，不在外面。
7. 有上即有下，有前則有後，有左則有右。
如意要向上，即寓下意。
8. 若將物掀起，而加以挫之之力。
斯其根自斷，乃攘之速而無疑。

3. *Tàijí* Classic (i) : **Chang San-Feng**

1. At the moment of movements, the body should be light, agile and most importantly connected together [synchronised].
2. The *qì* should be stimulated and the *shén* (spirit) gathered within.
3. Do not have deficient places.
Do not have any hollow or protruding places.
Do not have disconnected places.
4. The root [of the relaxed force] is in the feet, discharged through the legs, controlled by the waist, and expressed through to the fingers.
From the feet through the legs to the waist, should be one flow of *qì*.
5. When moving forwards and backwards you should be in the right position and the right moment.
When not in the right position or the right moment, and the body becomes disrupted, the fault should be sought in the waist and legs.
6. Up or down, forwards and backwards, left or right, are all the same.
All these are within the mind and not physically manifested.
7. If there is up, there must be down. If there is forwards there must be backwards. If there is left, there must be right. If the mind has an upward intention, simultaneously it must have a downward intention.
8. In lifting the opponent, first connect down, by doing so breaking the root, so that he can be plucked out in a flash of a moment.

9. 虛實宜分清楚。
一處有一處虛實，
處處總此一虛實。
10. 周身節節貫串，
無令絲毫間斷耳。
11. 長拳者，如長江大海，
滔滔不絕也。
12. 棚攬擠按採捌肘靠，
此八卦也。
13. 進步退步左顧右盼中定，此五行也。
14. 棚攬擠按，即乾坤坎離，四正方也。
15. 採捌肘靠，即巽震兌艮，四斜角也。
16. 進退顧盼定，即金木水火土也。
合之則為十三勢也。
17. 原註云。此係武當山張三丰祖師遺論。
欲天下豪傑延年益壽。不徒作技藝之末也。

9. Substantial and insubstantial should be clearly differentiated.
In every part there is both substantial and insubstantial.
The principle of substantial and insubstantial applies to every situation.
10. The whole body should be connected together, joint by joint like string.
Do not allow the slightest disruption.
11. The *chángquán* (long fist: an earlier description of *Tàijíquán*) practitioner is like a river or ocean, continuously flowing and rolling without end.
12. The 13 Postures are: *péng* (ward-off), *lǚ* (roll-back), *jǐ* (press), and *àn* (push), *cǎi* (pluck), *liè* (split), *zhǒu* (elbow-strike) and *kào* (lean-on) represent the eight trigrams.
13. Step forward, sit backward, look left, look right and central equilibrium relate to the five elements.
14. *Pèng* (ward-off), *lǚ* (roll-back), *jǐ* (press), and *àn* (push) relate to *qián*, *kūn*, *kǎn* and *lí*. These represent the four cardinal directions.
15. *Cǎi* (pluck), *liè* (split), *zhǒu* (elbow-strike) and *kào* (lean-on) relate to *xùn*, *zhèn*, *duì* and *gě*, being the four diagonals.
16. Step forward, sit backward, look left, look right and central equilibrium are represented by metal, wood, water, fire, and earth respectively. All together these make up the thirteen postures.
17. The original annotation: This classic was left by the [legendary] founder, *Chang San-Feng* of *Wudang* mountain. The intended purpose was for the followers to attain health and longevity, not just for combat.

Discussion on: *Chang San-Feng Tàijí Classic*

1. We can only concern ourselves with agility and the internal changes once the body is balanced and relaxed, and there is *zhōngzhèng* (centre of equilibrium). The foundation of agility is to be relaxed. The Chinese character in this verse of the classic means 'light', but the same character when placed in different sentences can have a different meaning. In this instance 'light' means relaxed, and to be relaxed is to let go of any unnecessary tension when in position and in movement. Also, it is important to note that 'relaxed' in this context does not mean being soft and floppy. When you have agility, you can be lively in your movements and that will give you the ability to have whole-body synchronization in the movement. In the Chinese language, the characters light (relaxed), agile and lively always go together. To be agile the body must maintain its centre while in position, as well as during transition. Synchronization requires an understanding of the sequence of changes that create the movements, so they occur in relation to one another as connected movements, and not just coordinated actions. Only when the posture is totally connected and the movements are synchronised will there be a continuous flow in the movements.
2. 'The mind motivates the *qì* ', describes using the awareness to stimulate the *qì* and circulate it throughout the body, and the Chinese character *shén* (spirit) in this context means awareness. As an internal art, the mind awareness should be kept within the body to feel and understand the changes in the movements, and to cultivate the awareness of the relaxation and sinking. The *shén* (spirit - focus) should also remain within to prevent your attention wandering. You will only have relaxation and sinking if you

have an awareness of it taking place, and it will not happen if you are only thinking of it. The mind awareness will also enable you to cultivate putting the *Tàijí* principles into your body and your movements, and as you progress in your *Tàijí* practice, your movements will become internalised.

3. Deficiencies in *Tàijí* include not maintaining the *zhōngzhèng* (centre of equilibrium), not being *sōng* (relaxed), not turning from the *kuà* (hips) and *yāo* (waist) and being *dun* (disconnected). In *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) using *lì* (brute strength), resisting, not sticking or adhering are also deficiencies. To avoid deficiencies, every word in the *Tàijí* classics should be strictly followed. Therefore, both the physical postures and the movements should adhere completely to the *Tàijí* classic. When one movement is not complete and the practitioners move on to the next movement it is considered to be a hollow. On the other hand, if a movement is overdone then that is protruding. In the Wang Tsung-Yueh classic it is stated, “It must not be overdone or fall short”. If, in the practise of *Tàijíquán*, the practitioner does not adhere to all the *Tàijí* classics in the *Tàijí* form or pushing-hands, then the practitioner has deficiencies in his or her practise.

4. The *yǒngquán* (bubbling well) in the feet is the root of the body structure. When the feet are firmly grounded (rooted) you connect to “borrow the energy of the earth”, and any incoming force can then be neutralised by being emptied into the ground. The upper body will be free to relax, becoming agile and able to maintain the *zhōngzhèng* (central equilibrium) with ease.

The ‘Song of Substance and Function’ states that, “if the *yǒngquán* (bubbling well) has no root, the *yāo* (waist) has no control”. To cultivate the root in the feet, it is essential to relax the toes, not grip the floor, distribute the weight evenly over the whole sole, and soften the arch until the *yǒngquán* is in contact with the ground.

Whenever practising *chén* (sinking) in the *Tàijí* form, the mind awareness must be sent into the feet, through the *yǒngquán* (bubbling well), and projected deep into the ground. Sinking enables the practitioner to cultivate the root in *Tàijíquán*.

Once the feet are firmly rooted, bring the *jìn* (relaxed force) up through the legs. The *yāo* (waist), is positioned by turning from the hips, and this determines the direction of the discharge of relaxed force. The *jìn* is then transferred into the upper body by drawing under the tail-bone and keeping the hips seated, into the arms by ‘melting’ the upper body and dropping the shoulders, and then through the palms and into the fingertips. As stated in the *Tàijí* classic *The Understanding of the Thirteen Postures*, “When executing *fājìn* (releasing the relaxed force) the body should sink and completely relax”. Therefore when releasing (discharging) the relaxed force, the feet, the calf and thigh muscles, the body, arms and palms must be completely relaxed and the sinking process must continue.

From the feet to the legs and into the waist is a continuous synchronised movement and wave of mind awareness, and therefore one flow of *qì* without a break.

Importantly, when releasing the relaxed force in any posture of the *Tàijí* form, there should not be any decrease of connection of the feet with the ground, otherwise no force can be borrowed from the earth. You should clearly feel the force being released through the legs without exerting unnecessary effort. There shouldn’t be any increase of tension in the arms, palms or even fingers. In *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) the force is issued from the legs, and the only functions of the arms and hands are sticking, adhering and listening. As Professor Cheng Man Ching says, “when you push (issue the force), push as if you are pushing with the legs”.

5. If moving forwards and backwards is awkward, there will be a disconnection that prevents the body from moving as one. The cause is likely to be the position of the legs in relation to the upper body, or the *yāo* (waist) having lost its mobility due to the *kuà* (hips) not being seated into the pelvic sockets. *Tàijí* movements are synchronised whole body movements, not regional or independent movements. Turning must always be from the *kuà* (hips) and *yāo* (waist) otherwise the body becomes locked and the movement will be disconnected. All other *Tàijí* movements begin from the base. Cheng Man-Ching also said that “adjustments must be initiated from the legs”, and that “the legs are *yáng*, the upper body is *yīn*”. Even the slightest

response and adjustment begins from the legs and it must be a whole body synchronisation.

6. Sometimes in *Tàijí*, up, down, forwards, backwards, left and right are not physical movements, but only mind intentions. [These are the internal representations of the four cardinal directions]
7. Everything is relative to its opposite. If there is *yīn*, there is *yáng*; if there is up, there must also be down; if there is forwards, there must also be backwards; and if there is left, there must also be right.

In *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) when you draw someone up to a point where they begin to lose connection, they will most likely withdraw downwards. When you draw people forwards beyond their centre, they will attempt to sit back. When you lead people to the left further than their balance allows, they are likely to turn back to the right. In all of these situations the moment of change of direction presents an opportunity where the opponent can be easily toppled.

To maintain grounding and a connection to your own (and opponent's) root, as the mind has an upward intention there must simultaneously be another wave of mind awareness sent deep into the earth. Otherwise, you will actually be uprooting yourself.

8. To lift an opponent you first must send your mind awareness into the ground under your feet and, when you are connected in your own feet, then your force will also be in the feet of the opponent to break the root (this process is the same as you are sinking in the *Tàijí* form). Once the root is broken, pushing in any direction is an easy matter.
9. Substantial and insubstantial are not referring to weight distribution, but *force* distribution. Wherever there is force, whether on oneself or the opponent, it is substantial - *yáng*, and where there is no force it is insubstantial - *yīn*. It is essential to distinguish both your own and your partner's substantiality and insubstantiality. When executing *fājìn* (releasing the relaxed force) from the right substantial foot, the principle of cross-alignment requires that it is transmitted through the left substantial arm, and vice-versa. The *jìn* (relaxed force) should be directed into the root of the opponent, which is

located beneath their substantial foot. When the opponent's substantial force contacts any part of your body, that point must immediately become insubstantial. Substantial and insubstantial are not simply one being left and the other right, or similarly up and down, but both are present in every part of the body, constantly interchanging, re-balancing and adjusting to the situation. Substantial and insubstantial have no fixed place or time and they change with the movement and the situation. Throughout the *Tàijí* form the substantial and insubstantial changes with the movement, and in pushing-hands your own substantial and insubstantial should change with the opponent's movement.

10. To achieve a whole body synchronisation, every part of the body must move and change while connected to, and in relation with, each other. When complete synchronisation is achieved there is no likelihood of disconnection and when the movements are synchronised then there are no gaps for the opponent to take advantage of. In the Song of *Tuīshǒu* it says, "When the upper and lower body is moving in synchronisation, it is difficult for your opponent to come in".
11. In ancient times *Tàijíquán* was referred to as *chángquán* (long fist). Regardless of name, when a practitioner performs the form or *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands), their movements should be like the rolling flow of the river, never ending and leaving no gap for an opponent to enter. The circulation of *qì* (vital energy) is comparable to the currents and tides of the ocean, and the *jìn* (relaxed force) generated, relates to the waves and surf.
12. *Péng* (ward-off), *lǔ* (roll-back), *jǐ* (press) and *àn* (push), *cǎi* (pluck), *liè* (split), *zhǒu* (elbow-strike) and *kào* (lean-on) are the four cardinal directions and four diagonal directions respectively. Together they make up the eight trigrams.
13. Step forward, move backward, look left, look right, central equilibrium, equate to the five elements; Look right (metal), look left (wood), move backward (water), move forward (fire) and central equilibrium (earth). Step forward, move backward, look left, look right and central equilibrium are the external, while the internal are sticking, joining, adhering, following, non-resisting and non-disconnecting.

14. *Péng* (ward-off), *lǔ* (roll-back), *jǐ* (press) and *àn* (push) relate to *qián*, *kūn*, *kǎn* and *lí*. These represent the four cardinal directions, which are ward-off (south), push (north), roll back (west) and press (east). The external is the cardinal directions and the internal are the ward off, roll back, press and push forces.
15. *Cǎi* (pluck), *liè* (split), *zhǒu* (elbow-strike) and *kào* (lean-on) relate to *xùn* (wind), *zhèn* (thunder), *duì* (swamp or lake) and *gě* (mountain). These represent the four oblique directions, which are lean-on or shoulder (south-west), elbow (north-east), split (south-east) and pluck (north-west). The external are the oblique directions and the internal are the pluck, split, elbow and shoulder forces.
16. Together, the four cardinal directions, the four oblique directions and the five elements, make up the classical thirteen postures.
17. A notation on the original document states that, “this ‘Classic’ was left by Chang San-Feng from *Wudang* mountain”, being the legendary founder and birthplace of *Tàijí*. The author goes on to identify the purpose of the art as being for students to live long healthy lives, not simply as a method of fighting.

山西王宗嶽
太極拳經

1. 太極者無極而生。陰陽之母也。
2. 動之則分靜之則合。
3. 無過不及隨曲就伸。
4. 人剛我柔謂之走，
我順人背謂之黏。
5. 動急則急應，
動緩則緩隨。
6. 雖變化萬端，而理為一貫。
7. 由着熟而漸悟懂勁。
由懂勁而階及神明。
8. 然非功力之久，不能豁然貫通焉。
9. 虛靈頂勁氣沉丹田。
10. 不偏不倚忽隱忽現。
11. 左重則左虛，右重則右杳。
12. 仰之則彌高，
俯之則彌深。
進之則愈長，
退之則愈促。

4. *Tàijí* Classic (ii) : **Wang Ts'ung-Yueh**

1. *Tàijí* is born from *wújí*. It is the mother of *yīn* and *yáng*.
2. In movement it [*yīn* and *yáng*] separates and in stillness it unifies.
3. It must not be overdone or fall short.
Respond to the curve with expansion.
4. When the opposition is strong, become supple; this is yielding.
Follow the person back without disconnection; this is sticking.
5. When the movement is fast, respond quickly.
When the movement is slow, follow slowly.
6. Although there are many variations, there is only one principle.
7. Proficiency evolves into understanding the forces.
Understanding precedes spiritual clarity.
8. Only through persevered practice will profound understanding be attained.
9. Be conscious on the crown of the head. Sink the *qì* to the *dāntián*.
10. Do not tilt or lean. Suddenly conceal and suddenly reveal.
11. When the left is substantial, the left becomes insubstantial
and when the right is substantial, the right becomes insubstantial.
12. When the opponent attacks upwards, I lead him higher
When the opponent attacks downwards, I draw him lower.
When he steps forward, I over extend him.
When he withdraws I close onto him.

13. 一羽不能加，蠅蟲不能落。
人不知我，我獨知人。
14. 英雄所向無敵，蓋皆由此而及也。
15. 斯技旁門甚多，雖勢有區別。
概不外乎壯欺弱，慢讓快耳。
16. 有力打無力，手慢讓手快。
是皆先天自然之能，非關學力而有為也。
17. 察四兩撥千斤之句，顯非力勝。
觀耄耋能禦眾之形，快何能為。
18. 立如平準，活似車輪。
偏沉則隨，雙重則滯。
19. 每見數年純功，不能運化者，
率自為人制，雙重之病未悟耳。
20. 欲避此病，須知陰陽相濟，方為懂勁。
21. 懂勁後，愈練愈精，默識揣摩，
漸至從心所欲。
22. 本是舍己從人，多誤舍近求遠。
所謂差之毫釐，謬以千里。
學者不可不詳辨焉。是為論。

13. A feather cannot be added. A fly cannot settle.
14. The opponent is not aware of me, but I'm fully aware of him.
He who has achieved all of this, will be invincible.
15. There are a lot of other martial arts, with differences in style and movement. However, their basis is the strong overcoming the weak or the slow giving way to the fast.
16. The strong overcoming the weak and the slow giving way to the fast is simply an innate skill and not an achievement of martial art study.
17. Considering the verse; "Only four *tael* are required to neutralise a thousand *catty* of force", shows that victory is not due to superior strength. Observing an old man defeating a mob raises the question; what is [the value of] speed?
18. Stand like a level scale, be mobile like a wheel.
Sinking allows you to follow, double heaviness causes you to be stagnant (hindered).
19. Someone after years of dedicated practice being unable to adjust or neutralise, and is easily defeated by others, has not understood the fault of double heaviness.
20. To avoid this fault, you must understand the harmony (dynamic association) between *yīn* and *yáng*. This will lead to *dongjìn* (understanding the forces/energies).
21. Once *dongjìn* is achieved; further practice and analysis develops greater refinements. Gradually you will reach the stage where everything extends from the will of the mind and *xīn* (heart).
22. The foundation is to forget yourself and follow the other.
Most mistakenly neglect the near and pursue the far.
It is said: "To miss by a fraction of a *li* is to miss by a thousand *li*.
The student must comprehend all of these points fully,
so I [Wang Ts'ung – Yueh] say.

Discussion: *Wang Ts'ung-Yueh Tàiji Classic*

1. *Wújí* is a state of nothingness; no thoughts nor movements. The moment a thought enters the mind, *wújí* ceases to exist. It then changes into the state of *Tàijí*, which comprises of *yīn* and *yáng* aspects. Therefore *Tàijí* is the mother of *yīn* and *yáng*.
2. In movement, *yīn* and *yáng* are born and are separate but remain in harmony. In stillness they return to the state of *wújí*.
3. Movements in the *Tàijí* form and *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) must not be excessive or deficient. This emphasises the importance of accuracy within the movements. Overdoing or under-doing movements results in locking yourself up or becoming vulnerable to an opponent's attack. These faults cause either the disconnection from, or the obstruction of, the relaxed forces.

To counter the opponent's neutralisation in *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands), cut into their curve and expand in a straight line. This response will negate their neutralisation and enable you to successfully complete your release (bisecting a circle always locates its centre).

Respond to the curve (curve also means to contract or withdraw) with expansion means no resistance or disconnection. When the opponent curves (contracts) I extend to adhere (stay in connection); and when he extends I curve (yielding, with no resistance).

4. When the opponent is hard I become supple; that is yielding. Yielding is not running away, it is to move into a better (more advantageous) position and the timing of it has to be in relation to the incoming force. Yielding must

always be accompanied by sinking, so the incoming force can be taken into the ground and completely neutralised, otherwise it is merely extended and weakened and therefore still on you. Yielding is not defending; defending is passive aggression. One must yield to every movement of the opponent, not only when they are coming in for a push. By only yielding when an attack is imminent it will be too late, just like a chicken trying to struggle free after it had been caught by the legs.

To flow with the back of the person, that is adhering. The back of the person is referring to the direction of the force from the opponent, not their physical back. There is a difference between sticking and adhering. To stick is to make contact, and you initiate it. Adhering is to maintain the contact at all times both in movement and in position; i.e. when the opponent initiates a movement you must follow without losing contact.

5. The speed of the movements in *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) is determined by your opponent. To be able to synchronise with the speed, whether fast or slow, you must stick, adhere, and follow letting the opponent initiate every movement.
6. Although there are many different movements, the guiding principle is consistent throughout. Although there are tens of thousands of movements and changes, there is only one principle in the movements and changes. The movements and changes are always relaxed, supple, sinking, connected, centred and synchronised.
7. When you become skilful, you can reach the state of *dǒngjìn* (understanding the forces). This means you can completely understand the changes in your own body's movement, both in the *Tàijí* form and pushing-hands, as well as the movement of your opponent, and you must be able to experience all of the *Tàijí* principles in your body. *Dǒngjìn* is evident when the opponent does not move; you do not move, and when the opponent has the slightest movement; you have already moved ahead. *Dǒngjìn* later evolves into the state of spiritual clarity or *Tàijí* enlightenment. At this level even when the opponent does not move, you move ahead. In this case, although there is no apparent physical movement, the opponent has already formed a mental intention to move. Recognising this moment is possible once you have

developed the deep sensitivity to 'listen' without depending on physical contact.

8. Spiritual clarity (*Tàijí* enlightenment) only comes after many years of consistent practice, and *Tàijí* is a life-long process.
9. Being conscious of the crown of the head carries the same meaning as visualising the head to be suspended from above. The aim is to keep the body erect and upright, and control the centre of equilibrium, thereby reducing the likelihood of the chest collapsing (shoulders hunching) when relaxing the body. When there is a consciousness at the crown of the head one will feel that the spine is being lengthened. The *qì* sinks into the *dāntián* by using the mind awareness to guide it there, and must not be done forcefully. The *qì* needs to be gathered and stored in the *dāntián* (the sea of *qì*) before it can be directed to other parts of the body (after the *qì* is stored in the *dāntián* it is then directed down the legs, through the "bubbling well" into the ground. This is the sinking process, and then from the ground it is directed back up through the legs and the body to the finger tips, this is the process of borrowing the energy from the earth). The ability to sink the *qì* into the *dāntián* represents entering the first stage of the 'Earth' level.
10. The body must be upright and level. Any leaning forwards or backwards or tilting to one side will result in the posture losing its centre of equilibrium. Being level will enable you to have the mobility of a wheel when turning. To suddenly reveal and suddenly conceal means you have the ability to change between substantiality and insubstantiality at will, and therefore in pushing-hands your opponents will be unable to predict your changes and will be at a loss to respond to you.
11. The *Tàijí* theory of cross-alignment states that the force from the left foot is delivered through the right arm, and conversely the force from the right foot is delivered through the left arm. Releasing the force from the left foot with the left arm or the force from the right foot with the right arm, is regarded as a fault of *shuāngzhòng* (equal heaviness). In *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) when there is a force (substantial) coming onto the left side of your body, then the left side of the body must become insubstantial and when there is a force (substantial) coming onto the right side of your body then the right side must become insubstantial. This is also the meaning of when the left

is substantial, the left is insubstantial and when the right is substantial the right become insubstantial.

12. Over-extending the opponent will disconnect them from their centre and root. When the opponent attacks upward; lead them higher than was intended, thereby avoiding places for them to utilise. When the opponent attacks low, draw them even lower by creating an 'emptiness', causing them to lose their balance. When the opponent steps forward, over-stretch them to bring them out of their centre. Once the opponent realizes that they are out of their centre, they will inevitably withdraw. Because you are sticking to and have disconnected their root, they will not have a chance to regain themselves. In short you always yield and neutralize in response to every movement of your opponent so that their force never has a place on which to settle. This principle reinforces the importance of the earlier principle, "When the opponent is hard, I am subtle."
13. After years of practice you can develop such sensitivity that the weight of a feather or fly will set you in motion. In *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands), as long as the opponent force is heavier than a feather or fly you must yield in response to it. It is not that you move away from the force, it is the force (feather or fly) that sets you in motion and the movement, no matter how small it is, must be a whole body synchronisation not a regional movement. When the level of *dǒngjìn* is achieved, you will be constantly aware of your opponents' forces.
14. When you are able to conceal your intention, your opponents will not be aware of you.

When you achieve all of the above, there will be no match for your *Tàijí* skill. However it is no achievement to merely repeat the theory. Rather the principles must be evident in your body, with you having acquired the ability to apply them practically.
15. There are several kinds of other martial arts e.g. Shaolin, Karate Do, Hung Gar etc, and even more if you consider the styles within each. What the training for most of these systems has in common is the emphasis on strength and/or speed. Essentially they develop techniques involving stronger forces or greater speeds, to overcome their opponents.

16. The concepts of the weak being overcome by the strong, and the slow giving way to the fast, are not special martial art skills. This is a natural born knowledge and is not something that you have train and practice to achieve. These are base level instincts, and are utilised in almost every sporting arena.
17. To understand how the weak can overcome the strong, you have to study the principle of four tael dealing with a thousand catty. This principle is expressed in the Song of *Tuīshǒu*. When you observe an old *Tàijí* adept pushing around numerous younger students, you will see the little value of physical speed. Because of his *tīngjìn* (listening) and *dǒngjìn* (understanding) the adept will know the opponents' intentions before they have even commenced their physical movement. Consequently such an adept is always one step ahead. This is *Tàijí* speed. The ordinary people rely on strength (brute force) and speed but an old *Tàijí* practitioner relies on wisdom and skill
18. You must be upright and balanced like a level scale to achieve central equilibrium. When you have the mobility of a wheel, you cannot get stuck and forces will not be able to land on you. In any movement there must also be sinking, so any inbound force will be absorbed from the point of contact, through the body, the legs and the feet into the ground. There should be no resistance and no obstruction in the body, so that when you relax you become grounded. You must develop the ability to follow the opponent without hindrance. Double heaviness results from opposing force with force, and consequently the body tenses up, agility is lost and the grounding is undermined causing obstruction and immobility.
19. If, after many years of practice, you cannot apply the principles in *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) and always get pushed around by your opponents, it is because you have not understood the error of double heaviness, and its cause. Double heaviness is not about weight distribution, it is about force distribution. It is also known as the substantial (*yáng*) presence of force and the insubstantial (*yīn*) non-presence of force. Substantial and insubstantial have no fixed place and time; in the *Tàijí* form they change with the flow of movement and in *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) they change with both the opponent's force and your own response to the force. Meeting force with force (*yáng* and *yáng*) is a fault in *Tàijí* called double heaviness and is the

greatest fault in *Tàijí tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands). Meeting *yáng* with *yīn*, or meeting *yīn* with *yīn* are not faults however.

20. To overcome the fault of double heaviness, harmonise the *yīn* and *yáng*. The problem is that in the art of *Tàijí*, practitioners often make *yīn* and *yáng* into something mystical whereas “*yīn* and *yáng*” is simply a term in the Chinese language to describe two opposite things that have a relation to each other, for example, right and left, man and woman, day and night, positive and negative and substantial and insubstantial. In *Tàijí* it is referring to substantial and insubstantial (force distribution) so that when the opponent is ten per cent *yáng*, you are ten per cent *yīn* and vice-versa. Therefore whenever there is a force (substantial) we must respond with no force (insubstantial), and this is the meaning of the harmony of *yīn* and *yáng*. To do this you must first develop *tīngjìn* and *dǒngjìn*; the listening to and the understanding of the forces.
21. Even after achieving *dǒngjìn* (understanding) you must continue to practice, analyse and refine your practice to achieve the level of *Tàijí* enlightenment. At this level, the body will naturally follow the will of the mind and heart (conscience).
22. The foremost principle is to not assert yourself but rather to harmonise with your opponent (to follow the other). Leave the initiation of any movement to the opponent and do not impose any push on them (your opinion); this is the meaning of giving up yourself and following the other. However, one thing you must never give up is your central equilibrium. Follow the other but do not follow blindly, and when the opponent initiates the movement follow until they have committed themselves and you should take over the lead. This is also the meaning of first being motivated then becoming the motivator. Unfortunately most practitioners ignore the process (the near), and instead look for the result (the far). In the *Tàijí* form the “far” represents the external movements and the “near” represents the internal changes within the movements. Understanding the changes within the movements is the essence of *Tàijí*. In *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) the “near” is your own connection, root, relaxation, sinking and synchronisation of your movements in response to the incoming force; and the “far” is your opponent’s movements and changes. By focussing within yourself, then

in your response you are always grounded, connected relaxed and your movement is always a whole body synchronisation with continuous sinking. Thus the relaxed force will always be present and you can release at will, whilst any incoming force is neutralised into the earth. The accuracy of the movement and the process is more important. If you depart the origin with an error of one millimetre then you could miss the destination by hundreds of kilometres (in the Chinese ‘Old System’ of measurement a *li* approximates to 576 metres).

According to *Wang T’sung Yueh*; all *Tàijí* practitioners should understand the principles fully and clearly.

十三勢歌

1. 十三勢來莫輕視。命意源頭在腰際。
2. 變轉虛實須留意。氣遍身軀不少滯。
3. 靜中觸動動猶靜。因敵變化示神奇。
4. 勢勢存心揆用意。得來不覺費功夫。
5. 刻刻留心在腰間。腹內鬆淨氣騰然。
6. 尾閭中正神貫頂。滿身輕利頂頭懸。
7. 仔細留心向推求。屈伸開合聽自由。
8. 入門引路須口授。功夫無息法自修。
9. 若言體用何為準。意氣君來骨肉臣。

5. *Tàijí* Classic (iii): The Song of the 13 Postures

1. Do not take the song of thirteen postures lightly.
The source of life is in the waist area.
2. Attention must be paid to the changes of substantial and insubstantial.
Let the *qì* flow freely throughout the body.
3. Calmness precedes the motion and while in motion, calmness remains.
Effectiveness is demonstrated by adapting to the opponent's changes.
4. Using awareness throughout every movement, progress comes naturally.
5. Be aware of the waist at all times.
Relax the abdomen and the *qì* will come alive.
6. Tuck in the tailbone and have consciousness on [raise the *shén* to] the crown of the head. If the head is held as though suspended by the crown, the body will be agile.
7. Pay careful attention in your practice of pushing-hands. Let the movement of expanding and contracting, opening and closing be natural.
8. To be shown the route to the [*Tàijí*] door you need oral transmission.
Through continuous practice and self analysis comes the [*Tàijí*] method.
9. If asked the principle of the understanding and its application, answer; the *yì* (mind intention) and the *qì* are the kings, while the flesh and bones are their subjects.

10. 想推用意終何在。益壽延年不老春。
11. 歌兮歌兮百四十。字字真切意無遺。
12. 若不向此推求去。枉費功夫貽歎息。

10. What is the goal of understanding and its application?
To keep healthy, and have a long life.
11. This song, this song of one hundred and forty words.
Every word contains the truth and whole meaning.
12. If you do not adhere to the above,
your effort will be in vain and only a sigh will result.

Discussion on: *The Song of the Thirteen Postures*

1. These principles must be taken seriously and practiced diligently. The waist area is where the kidneys are located and in traditional Chinese medicine it is believed that the prenatal life force, inherited from your parents, is stored there. In *Tàijí*, the *kuà* (hips) and the *yaō* (waist) are the source of upper body mobility. When turning in either the *Tàijí* form or *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands), the turn must be initiated from the hips and waist, in connection with the changes in the base (legs).
2. You must always be aware of your own, and your opponent's, expressions of substantiality and insubstantiality. According to the theory of cross-alignment, when the right foot is substantial the left arm is substantial, and vice-versa. Similarly, when your opponent is substantial, you should be insubstantial. If your right arm and right foot are substantial at the same time, or you are substantial when your opponent is also substantial, then there is the error of *shuangzhúng* (equal heaviness - often mistranslated as 'double weighted'). This will severely hinder your movements and obstruct the flow of *qì*. One must remember that 'substantial' and 'insubstantial' have no fixed place or time, and they continually change with movement and according to the situation. Therefore, in pushing-hands one must be very sensitive to adjust one's substantiality and insubstantiality according to the changes of the opponent, in order to avoid committing the fault of double heaviness. When you can understand the changes between what is substantial and what is insubstantial, the *qì* will be able to flow freely throughout the body, directed by the mind.

In pushing hands the upper body should be *yīn* (insubstantial) and the base should be *yáng* (substantial). Every adjustment is initiated from the base, with the body and the arms just following. However, these changes must only be in response to your opponent, and not self-motivated. There are no fixed places or times (where or when) for the changes, it always depends on the situation.

3. The mind should be calm to motivate the *qì*, which in turn motivates the physical movement. During movement the mind should not drift off, it should be continually present within the movement. When the mind is calm throughout the *Tàijí* form, you can understand the changes that create every movement, and you can be aware of any tension in the body. During *tuīshǒu* (pushing hands), the calm mind provides you with the opportunity to 'hear' your opponents every move, and understand your reaction to it.

If you are able to adapt to the opponent's changes, their force will have nowhere to land. To be able to adapt to the changes of the opponent, you must be able to understand the principles of, and listen to, the changes between *yīn* (insubstantial) and *yáng* (substantial), while sticking, adhering, not resisting and not disconnecting.

When responding to the opponent you should not make any unnecessary movements, and the mind must remain calm.

4. Correct practice will produce natural progress. Correct practice includes having awareness of: the movement; the sequence that creates the movement; the timing of the changes; the connection; the centre of equilibrium while moving; and the relaxation and sinking within the movement. One must continually experience the *Tàijí* principles in every movement.
5. The hips (*kuà*) and waist control the direction of the upper body and therefore any change in the direction of the upper body must originate from the waist. If the abdomen is relaxed then the *qì* will naturally sink and gather in the *dāntián*, from where it can be directed to every part of the body.
6. When the tailbone is tucked under and the consciousness is on the crown of the head, the *níwán* (*baihui*) and the *huìyīn* are aligned and the central

axis within the body is established. Whilst the centre of equilibrium is maintained, visualising the head to be suspended from above decreases the likelihood of collapsing the chest or hunching the back. When the centre of equilibrium is maintained the body is centred, balanced, and therefore agile when moving. Central equilibrium is not only *one* of the original thirteen *Tàijí* postures, it is the foundation of *all* of them. Therefore central equilibrium must also be included in the other twelve postures, since without it you cannot really experience the subtle changes and deep relaxation.

The second part of this principle says "the whole body will be light and agile if the head is suspended from above". This has the same meaning as "raising your spirit" in the classic '*The Understanding Of The Thirteen Postures*'. There is a Chinese saying that if your head is bowed down (flopped), your *qì* will disperse. For the central equilibrium to exist the required physical structure includes being upright, a straight spine with the tailbone tucked under, and the *kuà* (hips joints) kept level. Both in the *Tàijí* form and during *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) the upper body should feel as if suspended lightly from above and the base sunken and firmly grounded.

7. To cultivate *tīngjìn* (listening) and *dǒngjìn* (understanding) of the forces; pay close attention to the practice of *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands), developing sticking, adhering, and following, while not disconnecting or resisting. When the listening and understanding have been achieved, the body will expand and contract, opening and closing naturally, without premeditation.
8. Beginners in *Tàijí* require a knowledgeable teacher to impart the *Tàijí* knowledge to them. Books and videos can only serve as references, and cannot actually teach you *Tàijí*. Progress only comes from practice and self-analysis. Learning without practising, is like eating without digesting. The teacher can show the way, but cannot directly pass on the skill; the students must walk the way (practice) themselves and their practice will enable them to develop the skill. Furthermore, the students must not learn and practise blindly. They must analyse both what has been taught and their own practice, whilst continually referring to the *Tàijí* classics to see if what they learn, and their practice, are in line with the principles. This is why even if a teacher is good it is not necessarily the case that all the students are good; or, when a father is good, that all of his children are good.

Remember that even the teacher is also a student, and his/her own understanding is evolving and changing, and may have errors. So if you follow blindly without analysing you may spend a lifetime practicing the wrong thing.

9. Question: What is the main principle of the understanding and application?
Answer: The subject / body (flesh and bone) must follow the commands of the king - *yì* (mind intention) and *qì*. In every movement, the mind motivates the *qì*, and the *qì* motivates the body. In the practice of *Tàijí*, you do not go to the forms to look for the *Tàijí* principles. You read and understand the principles and when you practice you must put the principles into the movements. Whichever principle the mind (*yì*) is aware of at any moment or in any movement, the body must respond to the principle. After prolonged practice the principles are naturally absorbed into the body and its movements.
10. The main aim of understanding and applying the *Tàijí* principles is to cultivate a healthy and long life.
11. In the original Chinese text the 'song' has twenty verses each with seven words, making a total of one hundred and forty words. The meaning of every word is clear and important.
12. If you do not follow the principles contained in this 'song' and do not base your practice on them, then your efforts will not achieve anything.

十三勢行功心解

1. 以心行氣。
務令沉着。
乃能收斂入骨。
2. 以氣運身。
務令順遂。
乃能便利從心。
3. 精神能提得起。
則無遲重之虞。
所謂頂頭懸也。
4. 意氣須換得靈。
乃有圓活之趣。
所謂轉變虛實也。
5. 發勁須沉着鬆淨。
專主一方。
6. 立身須中正安舒。
支撐八面。
7. 行氣如九曲珠。
無往不利。
(氣遍身軀之謂) 運勁如百煉鋼，無堅不摧。

6. *Tàijí* Classic (iv): **The Understanding of the Thirteen Postures**

1. The *xīn* (mind/conscious mind, awareness) motivates the *qì* and directs it to sink, so that it can be stored and concentrated into the bones.
 2. Let the *qì* motivate the body without hindrance, so that it will effortlessly follow your *xīn* (mind/conscious mind).
 3. If the *shén* (spirit) is raised, there will not be any sluggishness. This is the meaning of the crown of the head being suspended from above.
 4. There should be agility in the interaction of the *yì* (mind intention) and *qì*, so that it [the *qì*] will be circular and lively. This is what is meant by 'changing substantial and insubstantial'.
 5. When executing *fājìn* (releasing the relaxed force) the body should sink and completely relax. Focus on the one direction.
 6. When the body is upright, loose and tranquil, the feet will support all eight directions.
 7. Direct the *qì* like threading the 'nine bend pearls'; by flowing continuously it reaches everywhere unrestricted.
- [When the *qì* flows throughout the body] the *jìn* (relaxed force) is like tempered steel, overcoming all solid defences.

8. 形如搏兔之鶡。
神如捕鼠之貓。
9. 靜如山岳。
動如江河。
10. 蓄勁如張弓。
發勁如放箭。
11. 曲中求直。
蓄而後發。
12. 力由脊發。
步隨身換。
13. 收即是放，斷而復連。
14. 往復須有摺疊。
進退須有轉換。
15. 極柔軟。
然後極堅剛。
16. 能呼吸。
然後能靈活。
17. 氣以直養而無害。
勁以曲蓄而有餘。
18. 心為令。
氣為旗。
腰為纛。
19. 先求開展。
後求緊湊。
乃可臻於縝密矣。
20. 又曰：「彼不動，己不動。
彼微動，己先動。」
21. 勁似鬆非鬆，將展未展。
勁斷意不斷。
22. 又曰：「先在心，後在身。」

8. Have the appearance of a falcon preying on a hare.
Concentrate the *shén* (spirit) like a cat stalking a mouse.
9. Be calm like a mountain and move like a river.
10. Store up the *jìn* (relaxed force) like drawing a bow,
discharge the *jìn* (relaxed force) like releasing an arrow.
11. Seek the straight in the curve,
first store then discharge.
12. Force is released through the back,
the steps change with the body.
13. To receive is to release, if it disconnects then reconnect.
14. In moving forwards and backwards, there should be folding.
In advancing and retreating, there should be changes of direction.
15. Extreme softness yields to extreme firmness and tenacity.
16. Only with the ability to inhale and exhale, will there be agility.
17. When *qì* is cultivated naturally, there is no harm.
When the *jìn* (relaxed force) is stored, there will be a surplus.
18. The *xīn* (mind/conscious mind) is the commander, the *qì* is the flag and the *yāo* (hips and waist) is the banner.
19. First seek expansion while opening then seek contraction while closing.
It will lead to perfect refinement.
20. It is said; “If the other does not move, I do not move.
If the other has the slightest movement, I move ahead”.
21. The *jìn* (force) seems *sōng* (relaxed), however it is not *sōng* (relaxed),
it is about to expand, although it has not yet expanded.
The *jìn* (relaxed force) might disconnect, but the mind must not.
22. It is also said: “First the *xīn* (mind/conscious mind), then the body”.

23. 腹鬆氣沉入骨。
神舒體靜。
24. 刻刻在心。
切記：一動無有不動，
一靜無有不靜。
25. 牽動往來，氣貼背而斂入脊骨。
26. 內固精神。
外示安逸
27. 邁步如貓行。
運勁如抽絲。
28. 全身意在精神，不在氣；在氣則滯。
有氣則無力。
無氣則純剛。
氣若車輪，腰如車軸。

23. When the abdomen relaxes, the *qì* sinks into the bones.
When the *shén* (spirit) calms, the body becomes tranquil.
24. Keep this in *xīn* (in your heart).
Remember; when you move, every part moves.
When you settle, every part settles.
25. When moving forwards and backwards,
the *qì* sticks to the back and permeates into the spine.
26. Internally be acutely aware of the *shén* (spirit),
externally appear calm and relaxed.
27. Step like a cat.
Transmit the *jìn* (force) like reeling silk from a cocoon.
28. The *yì* (intention) should be on the *jìngshén* (spirit), not on the *qì*,
on the *qì* will stagnate.
With the *qì* there will be no strength. Without *qì* it is like tempered steel.
Qì is like the cart wheel and the *yāo* (waist) is like the axle.

Discussion on: *The Understanding of the 13 Postures*

1. The flow of *qì* is directed by the mind awareness (*yì*), which is itself divided into two parts. First there is the mind intention, which is the planning stage, and then there is the mind awareness which is when the process is taking place. Intention without awareness is a “dead mind”. The *yì* must first be sent into the *dāntián*, then to the limbs and finally through the *huìyīn* meridian point to the three gates the *wěilü*, *yùzhěn* and *níwán*. This enables the *qì* to be absorbed into the bones.
2. If the body has its centre of equilibrium, is relaxed and connected and the mind is calm, then the *qì* will be able to flow unhindered throughout the body. When the *qì* can flow unrestricted, it can be directed by the will of the mind.
3. When the *shén* (spirit) is raised and the *huìyīn* and *níwán* meridian points are in line, the centre of equilibrium is attained. The body will therefore be upright, centred, balanced and not sluggish. This is what is meant by the principle of visualising the head to be suspended from above.
4. When the movement is initiated by the mind leading the *qì*, the mind and *qì* (the *qì* here refers to breathing, which should be natural and relaxed, not heavy breathing or panting) interact with agility. The body is therefore able to move without hindrance, providing that the central equilibrium is maintained, the body is centred and grounded as well as left/right and up/down, being in balance. Then the flow of *qì* will naturally be circular and lively. This is also the meaning of, ‘changing the substantiality and insubstantiality’.

5. When executing *fājìn* (releasing the relaxed force), the body must be relaxed. Any excess tension in the body will reduce the percentage of grounding, and undermine the root. Tension will also lessen the connection of the arms to the body, the body to the base, and the base/feet to the ground. If *jìn* (relaxed force) is stored for release but the body is tense, up to 50% will be consumed by your own muscles, leaving a maximum of a half to be transmitted into the opponent. Complete relaxation is the only way to release the entire force, unrestricted.

Sinking is a mental process in which the mind directs the *qì* downwards through the body into the feet into the ground, creating a root, which is used to “borrow the energy from the earth”. Therefore if the body relaxes and sinks, compression develops which produces the spring-like *jìn* (relaxed force). When this *jìn* is released the mind should focus on the direction and project as far as possible beyond the opponent.

6. While the body is upright, the centre of equilibrium can be attained. When the body is loose, it is relaxed and free of tension. When the mind is tranquil, it can harmonise with the body. Then by being upright, loose and tranquil together, the upper body can become light and the base heavy (grounded), therefore able to support the body in all eight directions (the four cardinals plus the four diagonals).
7. The original Chinese text translates as “direct the *qì* like threading the nine bend pearls”. However it should not be taken literally, the term threading the nine bend pearls refers to flowing continuously. When the *qì* flows continuously, it reaches everywhere smoothly. When the body is centred, relaxed and connected, the mind will be able to direct the *qì* into the *dāntián* continuously, and from the *dāntián* into the feet, from which it rebounds into the fingers.

When the *qì* is able to flow smoothly and continuously throughout the body, from the *huìyīn* to the *níwán* (crown of the head), the relaxed force produced is as pure and powerful as tempered steel. When discharged nothing will be able to withstand it.

8. When an eagle is preying on a hare it circles with sharp eyes, alert for any movement. When a cat stalks a mouse it is calm, relaxed and focussed; only

pouncing when the time is right. Similarly in *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands), be sensitive at all times, and seize on every opportunity the moment it arises. The eagle represents staying aware for a chance to attack, while the cat signifies recognising the correct timing and direction. Avoid pushing blindly, when there is no opportunity to warrant it. A poorly timed or wrongly directed attack will certainly miss.

9. When not moving one should be as calm, still, grounded and sturdy as a mountain. When moving one should be flowing, soft and powerful as a river washing away everything in its path.
10. Before an arrow can be released, the string of the bow must be drawn to create the elastic force, and a spring must be compressed before it can produce a rebounding force. Similarly, before the body's *jìn* (relaxed force) is released, it is necessary to sink and load up. When releasing an arrow from a bow there should not be any hesitation and the focus should not be at the arrow head but on the target, the same applies to *fājìn* (releasing of the force). When releasing, one should not hesitate, because hesitation will reduce the power released. When the relaxed force is released the focus should not be on the hand or at the point of contact, but a point beyond the opponent, as far as the mind can focus.
11. The curve refers to neutralising, and the straight represents issuing. Seeking the straight in the curve means finding the opportunity to issue while neutralising the incoming force. By issuing during the neutralisation, you draw your opponent into an emptiness thereby uprooting him. Issuing without first neutralising results in force against force and means you are imposing or pushing against your opponent.

The yielding and neutralising movements are circular. When attacking, if you can establish a line from your feet through the point of contact into the opponent's substantial foot, you can bisect the opponent's circle, and render their neutralisation ineffective.

Neutralising in curves is *yīn*, attacking in straight lines is *yáng*. Therefore by neutralising without attacking, it is *yīn* without *yáng*, and usually results in being forced into a corner and still being pushed over. Continuing to attack in the one direction without turning, is *yáng* without *yīn*, and most

often results in being over-extended and easily rolled-back or plucked out. Therefore in straight there should be a curve and vice versa, then *yīn* and *yáng* will be in harmony. Sink to build up the energy, storing it before it is released.

12. When executing *fājìn* (releasing the relaxed force), the *jìn* (relaxed force) is transmitted through the back. During the process of releasing the tail bone tucks under to provide space for the back muscles to relax, the shoulder blades drop downward, and the shoulders sink. The footwork must follow the changes of the body movements.
13. To receive is to accept an incoming force without any resistance, allowing it to pass through the body into the ground, thereby completely neutralising it. It is not simply a sequence of entirely neutralising the incoming force then releasing your own; *yīn* and *yáng* must always be in harmony. This means that if there is ten percent of neutralising, then ten percent of force should be already returning to the attacker. This is very clearly demonstrated at the stage of *jièjìn* (receiving force). Whenever there is disconnection, connection must be restored immediately.
14. When moving forwards or backwards the technique of folding should be used. So that, for example, if the palm is neutralised then the forearm follows in, by folding at the wrist. Similarly if the forearm is neutralised then the elbow folds for the upper arm to follow in, and if the upper arm is neutralised, the shoulder folds for the body to follow in; this is the external folding. This is also what is meant by the statement “the hands are not [the only] hands, the whole body is the hands”. Internal folding is before the first wave of relaxed force is completely issued the second wave follows, and before the second wave is complete the third wave follows, thereby creating continuous waves of relaxed force, giving the opponent no chance to recover. This is like being swept off one’s feet by the undercurrent in the river and there is no chance to recover as the current is continuous without any break. When advancing or retreating there must always be a change in direction to avoid moving in a straight line or only turning in one direction. Any movement in one direction will eventually reach a dead end. Therefore any movement should be circular and, halfway through the first circle, one must change into the next circle in a different direction. It is a continuous

change of circular movements giving the opponent no chance of settling in the movement. The changes of direction are not fixed; they could be up or down, horizontal or vertical or diagonal, left or right circular movements. As with all movements in *Tàijí*, the circular movement should be initiated by the synchronisation of the base, hips, waist, body and arms.

16. Breathing naturally without holding the breath or panting, enables the body to relax and become agile.
17. When *qì* is cultivated and circulated, it results in good health, benefiting not harming the body. By storing the *jìn* (relaxed force) it becomes readily available. Continuously relaxing, sinking, and connecting, provides an on-going supply of *jìn* (relaxed force). In *Tàijí*, when such a force is constantly present in the body, it is termed *péngjìn*.
18. The *xīn* here refers to the mind intention (commander), the *qì* is the mind awareness (flag), the *yāo* (hips and waist) are the direction (banner).
19. First seek expansion (big, open movements) then seek contraction (small, compact movements). When initially practicing the *Tàijí* form and *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) pay attention to the external principles like being upright and level (maintaining central equilibrium) Using the *kuà* and waist to turn, relax and sit the hips, relax and sink the shoulders and drop the elbows and loosen the joint and muscles. This is seeking the expansion (big, open movements).

Then when you start to refine the *Tàijí* form and *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands), you should be listening to the sequence of changes within each movement, changing the different parts in relation to each other. Listen to the adjustment of every muscle during transition, and listen to the relaxation, sinking and the release of forces taking place in the changes. This is contraction (compact movements).

In the beginning your movements should be practiced big and expansive to open the joints and stretch the ligaments. With progression the timing refines and the posture sequences connect. These refinements naturally result in the movements becoming smaller more compact, and synchronised.

20. The movements of *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) should be initiated by your opponent. Therefore if your partner does not move, you do not move. By synchronising with his or her slightest movement and remaining connected, you can lead them into over committing themselves. This is what is meant by “moving ahead”, and is a clear example of *dǒngjìn* (understanding of the forces).

21. The *jìn* (relaxed force) is neither hard nor soft, but rather it is firm and springy. Every expansion also requires contraction, and in the *fājìn* (releasing of the force) there must be sinking.

After discharging your opponent, your *jìn* disconnects but your mind’s focus should continue to project in the same direction.

22. If the *xīn* (mind/conscious mind) is made king and the body the subject, the mind can command and the body will follow. Not only in *Tàijí*, but as with anything in life the mind decides what to do and the body follows. For example, when the mind decides to have a cup of coffee, then we make the coffee and drink it. It is certainly not *after* drinking the coffee that the mind decides that we want to have a cup of coffee. Therefore the mind makes the decision and the body carries out the decision of the mind.

23. When the abdomen is relaxed the *qì* will sink into the *dāntián*. From the *dāntián* it flows throughout the *huìyīn* into the three gates and absorbed into the bones, increasing the density of the bone marrow.

When the *shén* (spirit) is calm and in harmony with the mind, the body will be relaxed.

24. To begin any posture, every part of the body connects and changes in relation to each other to create the movement. To complete a posture every part of the body synchronises, so that even though they have different destinations, their time of arrival will be the same. In *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) when your opponent’s force is on you, it is the whole body that adjusts, not just the area immediately around the contact points. In *Tàijí* even the slightest movement is a whole body synchronisation not a regional movement. It is so important in this part of the *Tàijí* classics that it not only asks you to remember this principle but it asks you to keep it in your heart at all times.

25. When the *qì* is able to pass through the *huìyīn* meridian point to the *níwán* (crown of the head) meridian point, it indicates being in the third stage of the Earth level. At this point, when the *qì* travels through the three gates it will permeate into the spine and other bones.

26. Internally the mind and *shén* (spirit) must be calm, and externally there must not be any tension, so the *qì* can flow unhindered.

27. The footwork should be soft and balanced yet stable and grounded, just like a cat walking. During releasing, the *jìn* (relaxed force) should be one continuous flow, from the feet through the legs, hips, body, arms and fingers, without any pause or break. When silk is reeled off a cocoon it should be as a long, continuous thin thread of silk, because once it is broken it is of no use.

28. It is important to understand that in the Chinese language the same character can have a different meaning if placed in a different part of a sentence. The whole awareness should be in the mind not on the *qì*, and here the *qì* is referring to brute force. When using brute force it will stagnate because in a short time one will get out of breath and thereby lose agility. When there is *qì* (brute force) there will be no *lí*, and here the *lí* mean stamina because if you use brute force you will tire easily and lose your strength. When there is no *qì* (brute force) then you are relaxed and will be able to develop the relaxed force, which is like tempered steel.

Qì is like the cart wheel (here the *qì* is referring to the relaxed force) with the *yaō* (hips and the waist) being like the axle.

The axle moves the cart wheel, so the hips and the waist create the direction of the relax force.

打手歌

1. 棚攢擠按須認真。
2. 上下相隨人難進。
3. 任他巨力來打吾。
4. 牽動四兩撥千斤。
5. 引進落空合即出。
6. 黏連貼隨不丟頂。

7. *Tàijí* Classic (v): **The Song of *Tuīshǒu***

1. Be diligent about *péng* (ward-off), *lǔ* (roll-back), *jǐ* (press) and *àn* (push).
2. [If] Upper and lower are synchronised, it will be difficult for the other to come in.
3. Let him use immense *lì* (brute strength) to hit me.
4. Lead his movements with only four *tael* (approx. 15 grams) to neutralise a thousand *catty* (approx. 240 grams) of force.
5. Draw him into emptiness, join, gather [the force] then send it out.
6. *Nián* (adhere), *lián* (connect), *tiē* (stick), [and] *suí* (follow), without disconnecting or resisting.

Discussion on: *The Song of Tuīshǒu*

1. To be diligent is to not take it lightly; it is to study carefully and seriously. In the *Tàijí* form *péng* (ward off), *lǔ* (roll back), *jǐ* (press) and *àn* (push) are collectively known as Grasp the sparrow's tail. Grasp the sparrow's tail, according to Teacher Huang Sheng Shyan, is "the meat of the *Tàijí* form"; in other words it is the most important part of the form. There is a saying, that if you understand the Grasp the sparrow's tail you will understand the whole *Tàijí* form. Therefore, when practising this part of the form, attention should be paid to the accuracy of the movements and on putting the *Tàijí* principles into them, whilst understanding and remembering the changes and experiences in the movement. Whatever happens and whatever you experience in Grasp the sparrow's tail will also arise in all the other movements of the form, as well as in *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands). *Péng* (ward-off), *lǔ* (roll-back), *jǐ* (press) and *àn* (push) are the four cardinal directions in *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands), and attention must be paid to the accuracy of practising them. You should recognise when to *àn* (push); when to *lǔ* (roll-back); when to *jǐ* (press); and when to *péng* (ward-off). When using *lǔ*, you should not roll-back on to your own body. When using *péng*, you should not ward-off onto the opponent's body. When pushing (*àn*), or pressing (*jǐ*), you should first store the energy (absorb or sink) before releasing it. It is important to pay attention to the timing of yielding and neutralising.
2. The upper and lower body must be connected, centred and properly aligned. All parts of the body are synchronised and therefore move in relation to one another, thus making it difficult for an opponent to find a gap to enter

and attack. Even the slightest movement in response to any force or change must be a whole-body synchronisation and not a 'regional movement'.

3. Let the opponent expend all his force and effort attacking. This emphasises the futility of using brute force and the confidence of a genuine *Tàijí* practitioner in the handling of brute force. Teacher Huang used to say that "I am not afraid of my opponent having great strength or brute force, I am only afraid if he or she is more relaxed than me".
4. This sentence describes the fundamental principle of *Tàijí* in application as a martial art. Even if the opponent attacks with a lot of strength (one thousand *catty*), by following the direction and the momentum without resisting, the attack has nothing to land on and, using their momentum, it only requires a very small amount (four *tael*) of force to deflect and neutralise the attack.

Note: *Tael* and *catty* are ancient Chinese units to measure weight. 16 *taels* equal one *catty* (one *tael* is equal approximately 15 grams), and one *catty* equals approximately 240 grams).

5. While the above sentence describes the principles of application of *Tàijí* as a martial art, this sentence explains the method to apply the principle. There is a significant difference between drawing into emptiness and merely extending the force. Extending the force will weaken it, but there will still be force on you, whilst your opponent is still connected and will have the space and time to readjust. Drawing into emptiness is to let the opponent fall into a void, where they are completely uprooted and have no time or space to readjust. To be able to draw an opponent into emptiness one must have the ability to readily accept and receive an incoming force. If you resist or hold out against any pushes or force, you cannot draw the opponent into emptiness and you will give him a structure to use. Therefore, the foundation of a *Tàijí* push is to yield and accept any incoming force, not to push.
6. You should be like a sponge, which goes in as much as it is pushed and comes back as much as the withdrawal. When you can *tiē* (stick), *lián* (connect), *nián* (adhere) and *suí* (follow), without disconnecting or resisting, you will be able to follow any changes that the opponent makes. Practising all these qualities develops *tīngjìn* (listening energy), *dǒngjìn* (understanding energy)

and ultimately *shénmíng* (spiritual clarity / enlightenment). The external representations of the five elements are centre (earth), forward (fire), backward (water), left (wood) and right (metal). The internal representations of the five elements are sticking (making the first contact), adhering (without losing contact), following (going with the flow), disconnecting (losing contact), and resisting (going against the flow).

體用歌

1. 太極拳，十三式。
妙在二氣分陰陽。
2. 化生千億歸抱一。
歸抱一，太極拳。
3. 兩儀四象渾無邊，
禦風何似頂頭懸。
4. 我有一轉語，今為知者吐：
「湧泉無根腰無主，力學垂死終無補。」
5. 體用相兼豈有他。
浩然氣能行乎手。
6. 棚攪擠按採捌肘靠進退顧盼定。
7. 不化自化走自走。
足欲向前先挫後。
8. 身似行雲，打手安用手。
渾身是手手非手。
9. 但須方寸隨時守所守。

8. *Tàijí* Classic (vi): **The Song of Substance and Function** - Cheng Man-Ching

1. *Tàijíquán*, - the thirteen postures.
The marvel lies in the nature of *qì*, *yīn* and *yáng*.
2. It changes into infinity and returns to the one.
Returns to the one; *Tàijíquán*.
3. The two primary principles (*yīn* and *yáng*)
and four manifestations are without boundary.

To ride the wind, the head is suspended at the crown, from above.
4. I have words for those who can understand:
“If the *yǒngquán* (bubbling well) has no root, or the *yāo* (waist) has no control, life-long practice will be in vain”.
5. The training of substance and function need it (the above principle).

The *Hou Ran qì* (energy) must be able to flow to the fingers.
6. Always remain in central equilibrium during *péng* (ward-off), *lǚ* (roll-back), *jǐ* (press), *àn* (push), *cǎi* (pluck), *liè* (split), *zhǒu* (elbow-strike) and *kào* (lean-on), and also when stepping forward, sitting backward, looking left, looking right, and staying centred.
7. Neutralising without neutralising, yielding without yielding.
If you want to move the foot forward, you have to first sit back.
8. The body is like floating cloud, in the pushing-hands why use the hands?
The whole body functions as the hands, the hands are not the [only] hands.
9. There should be awareness and defending of every square inch at all times.

Discussion on: *The Song of Substance and Function*

1. *Tàijíquán* consists of the original thirteen postures: *Péng* (ward-off), *lǚ* (roll-back), *jǐ* (press), and *àn* (push) as the four cardinal directions, *cǎi* (pluck), *liè* (split), *zhǒu* (elbow-strike) and *kào* (lean-on) being the four oblique angles. Plus the five elements of stepping forward, sitting back, looking left, looking right and staying centred. The amazing thing about *Tàijíquán* is that it is never ending, constantly interacting, changing between *yīn* and *yáng*.
2. It is capable of an endless number of changes and yet able to harmonise and unify into one, that is *Tàijíquán* (*yīn* and *yáng*).
3. The changes of *yīn* and *yáng* and four manifestations are not limited by space or time.

Riding the wind means to be able to adapt to unpredictable changes in the situation and the force. To be able to ride the wind you must have an aligned centre of equilibrium. When the head is held as though the crown is suspended from the above the *níwán* and *huìyīn* meridian points will be vertically in line, the body will be upright, and therefore the centre of equilibrium will be achieved.

4. The author has words of advice for practitioners wanting to understand *Tàijíquán*: The *yǒngquán* (bubbling well) is a meridian point under both feet and serves as the root of the body's posture. It is through these, that both an incoming force is emptied into the earth, and the energy from the earth is passed from the ground into the body. When the *yǒngquán* (bubbling well) in the feet is not connected to the ground, the body is without root and any incoming force will only remain in the body. The result is double

heaviness, which hinders the body movement causing inflexibility. The loss of mobility in the hips means that the waist will be unable to control the direction of release. Under these circumstances, even after a lifetime of dedicated practice, no significant benefits will result.

5. In the substance [*Tàijí* form], the body and the function [pushing-hands] one must understand the above principle. If the *yǒngquán* (bubbling well) has no root then you are not connected and have no stability. Therefore one will be unable to change in movement or to swallow the *qì* of the heaven and borrow the *qì* from the earth.

Hou Ran qì (righteousness energy) will be present in the body if you are relaxed, connected, centered and grounded (root in the bubbling well) and able to direct it at will to the fingers tips, as stated in the no.7 principle in the classic “The Understanding of the Thirteen Postures”. To my understanding this energy is also known as *péng* force.

6. Establishing the centre of equilibrium is the function of the thirteen postures. In the postures of *péng* (ward-off), *lǔ* (roll-back), *jǐ* (press), *àn* (push), *cǎi* (pluck), *liè* (split), *zhǒu* (elbow-strike) and *kào* (lean-on), and also when stepping forward, sitting backward, looking left, looking right, and staying centred, the centre of equilibrium must be maintained.
7. Being able to neutralise without neutralising, and yield without yielding is termed *jièjìn* (receiving a force). When a *Tàijí* practitioner reaches this high level he or she can change without apparently changing, and act without any apparent action, allowing the incoming force to pass through the body (the body become an empty void) into the ground and rebound back up (action-reaction theory) sending the person off a great distance. This is when yielding, neutralising and issuing became one.

Before moving forward, you should sit back and sink into the rear foot to connect with the root, and if required to free the front foot to step forward.

8. We can all see clouds and yet an aircraft passes through them without obstruction. Clouds constantly change in response to the wind or atmospheric pressure. Similarly in *Tàijí* the body is ever changing in response to incoming

forces. In simple terms the upper body is *yīn* and the lower body is *yáng* with all adjustments beginning in the base. No force can land on the upper body if it constantly changes in relation to the adjustment of the base.

Why use the hands in pushing-hands? The only functions of the hands should be to stick and listen, not to push with. There actually isn't any need to push at all in *Tàijí*, just issue or release the relaxed force. The force itself originates in the feet and develops in the legs, and therefore it can be expressed through any part of the body in contact with the opponent. Hence the hands are not the [only] hands; all parts of the body are hands. This is the meaning of folding.

9. Mind awareness must be present in every part of the body and every movement at all times. Every part of the body and every movement should be defended or guarded, leaving no gap or opportunity for others to take.

楊家太極拳要領
楊澄甫口授

1. 虛靈頂勁。
2. 含胸拔背。
3. 鬆腰。
4. 分虛實。
5. 沉肩墜肘。
6. 用意不用力。
7. 上下相隨。
8. 內外相合。
9. 相連不斷。
10. 動中求靜。
11. 似拉鋸式。
12. 我不是肉架子。
13. 磨轉心不轉。
14. 撥不倒，不倒翁。

9. *Tàijí* Classic (vii): **Important *Tàijí* points from the Yang Family** — Yang Cheng-Fu

1. Raise the *shén* (spirit) to the crown of the head.
2. *Hán* (contain - not reveal) the chest and *bá* (spread) the back.
3. *Sōng* (relax) the *yaō* (waist).
4. Differentiate *shí* (substantial) from *xū* (insubstantial).
5. *Chén* (sink) the shoulders and hang [drop] the elbows
6. Use *yì* (mind intention) not *lì* (brute strength).
7. Upper and lower body synchronise.
8. Internal and external are in harmony.
9. Be connected, without discontinuity.
10. Seek calmness in movement.
11. [Be like] two men sawing.
12. I'm not a meat rack.
13. The millstone turns but the axle does not [turn].
14. Be an upright doll that cannot be pushed over.

Discussion on: ***Important Tàijí points from the Yang family***

1. Raising the *shén* (spirit) to the crown of the head is the same concept as holding the head as though being suspended from above, and being conscious of the crown of the head. One should feel as if the spine is lengthened. When I began training directly under *Huang Sheng-Shyan*, he occasionally placed an empty matchbox on my head while I practiced, which assisted me to maintain an awareness of the crown of my head throughout the form. Subsequently the body became upright with the *níwán* and the *huìyīn* meridian points aligned. After achieving this alignment, the postures revolve around the centre of equilibrium, which ensures agility in all the body movements.
2. *Hán* (contain not reveal) the chest by relaxing and emptying the chest from within. To avoid hunching the back while doing this, visualise the crown of the head as being suspended from above. According to Li Ya Xuan, who is a senior of Yang Cheng Fu, this principle does not exist in the art of *Tàijí*. It is actually a principle from *Xing Yi* and it was Cheng Wei Ming (a senior student of Yang Cheng Fu) who, before learning *Tàijí*, was training the *Xing Yi* system and later brought it into *Tàijí*. As time passed, *Tàijí* practitioners took it as one of the ten important points of the Yang family.

To *bá* (spread) the back, remove all tension in the back muscles and allow the shoulder blades to drop downwards. The *qì* will only sink into the *dāntián* when the chest is relaxed and emptied and the back is spread.

3. Relax the *yaō* (waist) by letting go of tension around the torso's mid-section and seat the *kuà* (hip joints) into their sockets. When the *yaō* (waist) relaxes

and the *kuà* (hip joints) are seated, there is an increase of mobility in the upper body. Bear in mind in *Tàijí*, when the *yāo* (waist) is referred to, it includes operating in conjunction with the *kuà* (hips joints), turning as one.

4. Many *Tàijí* practitioners oversimplify the differentiation of substantial from insubstantial, by only distinguishing the distribution of weight. In fact it has more to do with the force distribution within yourself, and with your response to the changes of your opponent's force distribution, in relation to yours. When the opponent is *yang* then you must respond with yin; this is the harmony of yin and yang. When the opponent is yang and you respond with yang, that is actually resisting, which is called double heaviness. Double heaviness is a major fault in *Tàijí*. Therefore if substantial and insubstantial are clearly differentiated then one will not commit the mistake of double heaviness. Remember that substantial and insubstantial have no fixed place and time, as they changes with your movement and those of the opponent.

Understanding your own substantiality and insubstantiality includes the principle of cross alignment (discussed further in my [note 9] interpretation of *Chang San-Feng* classic): When releasing *jìn* (relaxed force) from the right substantial foot, it should be transmitted through the left substantial arm and vice-versa. This is what is meant by "when the right is substantial the right is insubstantial and when the left is substantial the left is insubstantial". The ability to harmonise and change with any situation can only be achieved when able to differentiate the substantial from the insubstantial forces.

5. To *chén* (sink) the shoulders, is to soften the area around the shoulder joints and let go of the shoulder blades, with a downward intention. This connects the arms with the body. But one must not forcefully push the shoulders down. One must cultivate the relaxing of the body muscles, and when the body muscles are relaxed it will create a space for the shoulders to sink and therefore the sinking of the shoulders is related to the body relaxation. Hanging the elbows is achieved by letting the weight of the arms drop them downward, but not to a point of collapsing and when the shoulder joints are closed then the dropping of the elbows is overdone. In *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) the sinking of the shoulders allows the *jìn* (relaxed force) to pass from the torso into the arms, while the hanging of the elbows functions

as a pivot, directing the *jìn* (relaxed force) into the feet of the opponent to break the root. The inability to either *chén* (sink) the shoulders or hang the elbows, affects the relaxing and emptying of the chest and spreading of the back, which in turn restricts the sinking of the *qì* into the *dāntián*.

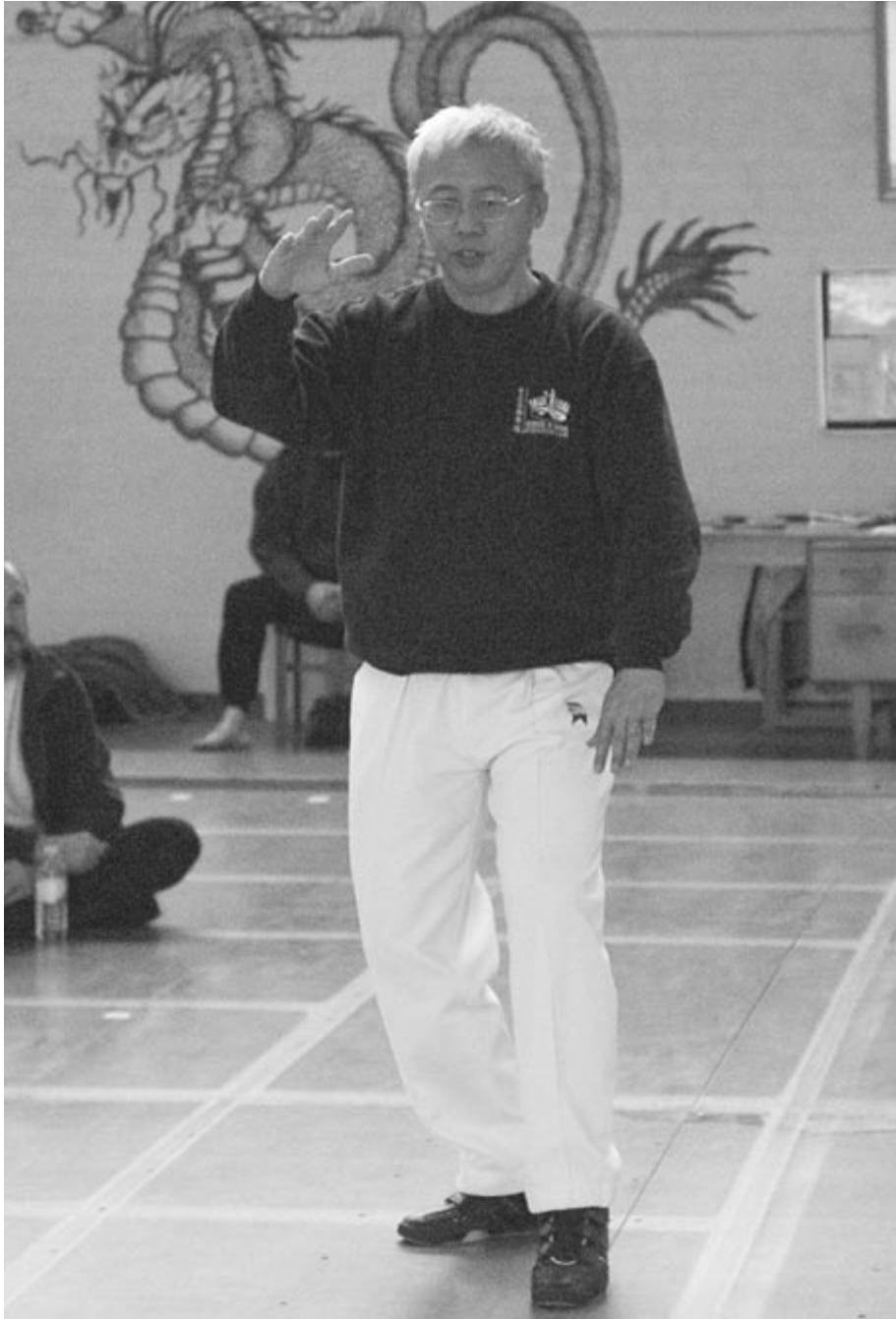
6. Use *yì* (the mind) not *lì* (brute strength). This is the difference between the internal and external martial arts. In external martial arts the training is often based around techniques using muscular strength and brute force. Such practice can only lead to the development of *lì* or physical power. *Tàijí* develops an internal power not requiring physical strength, by training the movements to be initiated by the *yì* (mind). The *yì* directs the *qì*, and the *qì* motivates the physical movement. When the *qì* reaches maximum compression, the *jìn* (relaxed force) produced becomes an internal power. Whilst physical strength has a limit, the power of the mind has no such constraint.
7. To achieve upper and lower body synchronisation, an understanding is required of the sequence of changes that create the movement. The sequences are timed to change in relation to one another as connected and synchronised movements, not merely as co-ordinated actions. All movements in the *Tàijí* form and pushing-hands are whole body synchronisations not regional movements, and all the movements begin from the base. The importance of this principle is stressed in the *Tàijí* classic The Understanding of the Thirteen Postures (principle 24) and In the Song of *Tuīshǒu* (principle 2).
8. For the internal and external to be in harmony, whenever the mind has an opening intention, the physical movement must also open. Conversely whenever the mind has a closing intention, the physical movement must also close.
9. From beginning to end in the *Tàijí* form, the movements are a continuous flow without disconnection. Like the rolling flow of the river, it never ends and leaves no gap for an opponent to enter. The *qì* is also a continuous flow, circulating like the currents of the ocean, with the *jìn* (relaxed force) as the constantly recurring waves.

10. When physically moving in *Tàijí*, the mind must remain calm and attentive. Calmness can only be achieved when the focus is brought within. In the *Tàijí* form, calmness of the mind cultivates awareness of the changes throughout the movements. While during *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands), calmness enables better detection of the opponent's intention. Calmness does not mean that the mind is empty of all thought. Calmness means the mind is aware of the process at the present moment, not thinking of the past or future.
11. Visualise two men using a two-person saw. Working in harmony they utilise the principles of sticking, adhering and following, while not resisting or disconnecting. It is an example of not resisting and not disconnecting, and the principle of yielding and following.
12. A meat rack is a place to hang dead flesh. During *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands), don't lean on your opponent or use insensitive heavy hands, as your opponent is not a meat rack. Stick using the lightest touch necessary to connect to his or her base. You are not a meat rack either, so don't allow any force to build up on you, or let them lean on you.
13. Visualise a line running centrally through the body from the *níwán* (crown of the head) connecting to the *huìyīn* meridian point, and this serves as the body's axle (central axis). Wherever a millstone is located, it still moves by rotating around its axle, and similarly the body position can change but it should revolve still around the central axis. To function effectively the millstone must remain level and the axle vertical, and similarly the body's central axis should be kept upright, particularly while turning. The centre of equilibrium can be easily maintained when turning like a millstone.
14. Be like a self-righting doll which, being weighted at the bottom and light at the top, cannot be pushed over. Visualise the crown of the head as being suspended from above, so that the spine is straight and the body vertical, and the centre of equilibrium can be maintained at all times. The feet must be firmly grounded, the upper body relaxed, the mind calm with continuous waves of *chén* (sinking) deep into the earth, even while an external force is affecting you. When this is achieved the upper body will be relaxed and light, the base will be grounded and heavy, like the self-righting doll.

10. The Body of *Tàijíquán*

The body of *Tàijíquán* is the *Tàijí* form. Regardless of what style of *Tàijí* is practiced, the *Tàijí* form is the first thing the beginner learns. The *Tàijí* form is a set of movements that the beginner uses to experience the *Tàijí* principles, and to learn to synchronise their body movement in the *Tàijí* way. It is also in the form that practitioners cultivate the awareness of their body, the relaxation, the sinking process, and the relaxed force itself. As Teacher Huang said, learning the form is like building a generator to produce the electricity (relaxed force). The *Tàijí* form is where the practitioners try to experience the *Tàijí* principles in the movement, without the distraction of any external forces affecting them. In other words, it is where the practitioners learn to understand themselves. If you are not aware of yourself, and your own changes, then you cannot even begin to understand the changes of another. That is why the old masters of *Tàijí*, when asked, always said "everything is in the form."





11. The Practice and Cultivation of the *Tàijíquán* Form

“Give up yourself and follow the other” it is said in the *Tàijí* classic “the Song of *Tuīshǒu*”, the classic of partner work or *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands). To be able to “follow the other” you must accept your opponent’s force and you need to have the correct structure to accept it. When someone offers you wine, you can’t possibly ask them to pour the wine on your palm, so you need a wine glass in which to receive it.

The Human Level

When you begin learning *Tàijíquán* you do not have any structure, so the teacher will teach you the *Tàijí* form to give you a structure in which to experience the principles and, regardless of the style of *Tàijíquán* you learn, the form is the foundation of the art. In learning the form the student must adhere strictly to the principles in the *Tàijí* classics as detailed in the previous chapter. The learning of the *Tàijí* form can be divided into two parts: practising the form, which focuses on the external movements, and then cultivating the form which focuses on the internal aspects.

The Chang San-Feng classic states “Do not have deficient places. Do not have any hollow and protruding places. Do not have disconnected places”, and in the Wang Ts’ung-Yueh classic it says “It must not be overdone or fall short.” So, what is the meaning of hollow? In this context, hollow means the movement is incomplete or falls short, and protruding means the movement is overdone or unnecessary. Disconnection is where the movement is not in one flow and uses excessive tension, i.e. a regional movement instead of whole body synchronisation. All of these will result in ‘deficient places’ and so these principles stress the importance

of accuracy and precision of movement when practicing and cultivating the *Tàijí* form. This is further stressed in the Wang Ts'ung-Yueh classic which says "A miss of a millimetre, is a miss of a thousand miles."

The classics also say, "Use your mind, not your brute force". In *Tàijí* the mind comprised of two components: first there is the intention and then it must be followed by the awareness. Intention without awareness is a "dead" mind, a mind without life, and right from the outset the beginner should start using the mind to remember the movements of the form.

In *Tàijí* there are thirteen 'postures'. First there are Ward off, Roll back, Press and Push (the cardinal directions) followed by Pluck, Split, Elbow and Shoulder (the oblique directions). Collectively they are referred to as the eight methods. Then there are Forward, Backward, Turn Left, Turn Right and Centre, which are known as the five doors, or ways.

The 'Centre' is referring to the centre of equilibrium, and it is the foundation of all the other twelve postures as they must all have the central equilibrium within them. Without central equilibrium you cannot talk about relaxation and changes, and it must be maintained when you are in position, in transition and during the issuing of the relaxed force.

"Tuck in your tail bone, have a consciousness on the crown of your head as if suspended from the top" and "Raise your spirit, you will have agility in the movements". Although these are from different classics the meaning is the same, and if in the practice of the *Tàijí* form the practitioner imagines that they have an empty matchbox on their head, then these principles will be realised. It is also said to "Stand like a level scale, you will have the mobility of the wheel" and "Do not tilt or lean". To realise these principles the hips need to be relaxed and seated throughout the form. All of these principles in the various classics emphasise the importance of the physical structure to maintain the central equilibrium. When the central equilibrium is maintained the practitioner will feel as if the spine has been lengthened and is balanced on all sides, "When the body is upright and tranquil, the feet will support all eight directions" (The Understanding of the Thirteen Postures)

If we consider the central equilibrium as the body of the *Tàijíquán* form, then relaxation would be its soul. Many practitioners have mistaken relaxation to be soft

and floppy, and in the *Tàijí* form or free partner work you will see people wriggling and 'noodling'. But actually, to be relaxed in *Tàijí* is to let go of any *unnecessary* tension that you might hold in the body or accumulate during movement. In order to relax you must first be able to feel the tensions in the body, and if you cannot feel your own tension then you can never relax. Relaxation comes from mind cultivation, using the mind awareness to tell the body to relax, and as the percentage of awareness of the body increases so will the degree of relaxation. In the end only the very minimum of tension is required to sustain the postures or movements, and anything more than is necessary is called tension in *Tàijí*. There is no end to cultivating this kind of relaxation and you can continue to increase the percentage of it. Some say that you should have absolutely no tension in *Tàijí*, but if you have no tension to support the structure and sustain the movements you will collapse on the floor! In the Chinese language the word is "fang sung", which literally means to "let go" and carries more meaning than just "relax", but what should we let go of? We should let go of *unnecessary* tension in the body.

The first principle of the Chang San-Feng classic states "At the moment of movement, the body should be light, agile and connected (synchronised)". It also says, "The whole body should be connected, do not allow the slightest disruption". The first connection is in the feet, which are the 'root' of the body posture, and they should be relaxed so that the 'bubbling well' is in connection with the ground. As Cheng Man Ching said in the Song of Substance and Function, "I have words for those who understand. When the bubbling well has no root, you have no control of the hips and waist". This will connect the feet (or foot, in postures where all the weight is on one foot or when sitting back) to the ground. The second connection is between the body (torso) and the base (legs). In the "Important points of the Yang family" it says "relax the waist". What is not commonly known is that in the teaching by the old masters the waist is referring to the hips (*kuà*) and the waist, not just the waist alone. The hips are not only relaxed but should also be seated, and my teacher, Huang Sheng Shyan always said to sit the hips. This will connect the torso to the base. The last connection is between the arms and the body, which is achieved by relaxing and sinking the shoulders. All of these physical connections should be maintained when in position, in transition and during the issuing of the relaxed force, both in the *Tàijí* form and partner work.

Any turning in the *Tàijí* form should be initiated by the hips and the waist, and the turning of the hips and waist is related to the changes from the base. If you turn the hips and the waist without the base changing then it is a regional movement and not a whole-body synchronization. In the *Chang San-Feng* classic it says “Control by the waist” and the Song of the Thirteen Postures states “The source of life is in the waist area”; “Be aware of the waist at all times”. To have mobility in the turning of the hips and waist and to “Turn like a mill stone” (important points of the Yang family) and to “Stand like a level scale, be mobile like wheel.” (*Wang Tsung-Yueh*). Both hips should be seated at all times and the centre of equilibrium maintained. *Cheng Man Ching* said that the base (legs) are the yang and the upper body and arms are yin. The base initiates all movement (changes) and the body and arms follow the changes of the base. All movements in the form and partner work are initiated by the base, and the turning of the hips and waist should be in relation to changes in the base. The *Chang San-Feng Tàijí* classic states “If there is no flexibility or momentum, and the body becomes disrupted, the fault should be sought in the waist and legs”

In this stage of practicing the form, attention should be paid to the accuracy of movement and then to put these principles into the form.

The Earth Level

The next stage is to cultivate the form, focusing on understanding the movements, the internal changes and the principles of the form.

“The spirit gathered within”; this is to have the calmness of the mind. To have calmness it’s not that the mind is blank, but it’s to have the mind awareness totally within the body to listen to the movements and changes within the body and not wander off. The classic in the Song of thirteen Postures and The Understanding of the thirteen Postures say “Let the *qì* flow freely throughout the body”. Direct the *qì* like threading the nine bend pearls (the phrase means flowing continuously) it reaches everywhere unrestricted”. However the mind awareness must not be too intense as intense awareness will lead to stiffness. “The *qì* should be stimulated”, so when you feel your movements the mind travels, and when the mind travels the *qì* travels; “the *xīn* (mind/heart) motivates the *qì*”.

In *Tàijíquán*, any movement is a whole body movement not a regional movement. “Keep this in your heart, remember, when you move every part moves, when you

settle, every part settles” (Understanding of Thirteen Postures) and “The upper and lower body should move in synchronisation” (The Song of Hitting Hands). Therefore it is important to understand the sequences of changes that create each movement of the form and for them to change in relation to each other in order to adhere to these principles. This is the meaning of understanding the movements.

In the *Chang San-Feng* classic it says “Throughout all movements, the body should be light, agile”. To be light is to be relaxed and to let go of any unnecessary tension in the body whilst in position and during movement. In the Chinese language the words light, agile and lively always go hand in hand. You need to be light in order to have agility (to have mobility in movements) and when you have agility you will be lively. Relaxation is cultivated by mind awareness and it is the foundation for the cultivation of the sinking and borrowing of energy from the earth. Therefore, as the mind awareness is listening to the changes in the movements it should tell the body to let go of unnecessary tension in any part of the body it passes through. It is not just listening to the adjustment of the joints in the feet, ankles, hips, shoulders, elbows and wrists, but also the adjustment and relaxation of every muscle in the feet, calves, thighs, body, arms and even the neck and face adjusting in relation to each other. It is particularly important to cultivate the movement of the muscles (the melting sensation) in the body, upper and lower back, the tail bone area and the relaxation in the chest from within. The movements in the body will enable the base (legs) and the arm movements to be connected, otherwise they will only be coordinated and therefore moving independently of each other.

In the cultivating of the sinking and borrowing of energy from the earth (issuing of relaxed force) in the *Tàijíquán* form, the late master *Huang Sheng Shyan* said the mind must be aware of three points in the body: the *bai hui* meridian point at the crown of the head, the *yǒngquán* meridian points in the feet (known as the bubbling well), and the *lau kong* meridian points at the centre of the palms. Both the sinking and the borrowing of energy from the earth are mental processes and the cultivation of relaxation still continues in these processes.

In the *Tàijíquán* forms when you make any movement you must let the mind awareness flow down from the *bai hui* meridian point, and in doing so you will be “swallowing the *qì* of the heaven”, as *Cheng Man Ching* put it. Continue to

let it flow through the head and the neck, down through the body, the legs and the feet, through the *yǒngquán* meridian points deep into the ground under both feet. Visualise the ground under both feet is disappearing and feel the feet go deep into the ground, not pressing against the ground. If in a bow stance or parallel stance this should be visualised into the ground under both feet, or into the ground under the substantial foot either when sitting back or in a posture where all the weight is on one foot. This process is known as sinking in *Tàijíquán*, and throughout it the practitioner must continue to experience the relaxation and adjustment of every muscle in the posture. Sinking will give the practitioner stability and create the root in the feet to connect with the energy of the earth, thus producing the relaxed force (*jìn*). Although relaxation is the foundation of sinking, working only on relaxation without sinking will not give the practitioner stability or produce any relaxed force.

Once the movement arrives at its final position there is a release of the relaxed force. After sinking the mind awareness into the ground, the practitioner must then visualise it rebounding up from the ground under the feet, through the “*yongquán*”, the legs and the body, through the shoulders into the arms and passing through the “*lau kong*” meridian points to the finger tips. This process is to borrow the energy from the earth (issuing of relaxed force). In the *Chang San-Feng* classic it states “The root is in the feet, the force is discharged through the legs, controlled by the waist and expressed through the fingers”. Therefore during the borrowing of energy from the earth, there should not be a decrease of connection of the feet with the ground, so you must continue to experience the adjustment of every muscle in the legs, body, arms and fingers, and there should also be waves of sinking during the release of the relaxed force. The process that happens in the releasing of the force from the feet through the body to the finger tips is the same process as *fājìn*. Therefore the practitioner should try to remember the experience and when executing the *fājìn* in *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) they must feel the same experience. In the Song Of Understanding of the Thirteen Postures it says “When executing *fājìn* (issuing the relaxed force), the body should completely relax and sink”. At this stage the continuity of the physical movement is not important because the practitioner has to complete and experience the changes in both the sinking and the release of the relaxed force.

Both in the process of sinking and of borrowing the energy from the earth, the mind awareness travels extensively throughout the whole body. When the mind travels, the *qì* travels and therefore the *qì* is stimulated, and so the principles of “sink the *qì* into *dāntián*” (*Wang T’sung-Yueh* classic), “let the *qì* flow freely through the body” (Song of Thirteen Postures) and “The *xīn* (mind/heart) motivates the *qì*, direct it to sink, so that it can be stored and concentrated into the bones” (The Understanding Of The Thirteen Postures) will all be achieved.

Stability in the base (lower body) comes from relaxation and sinking, not from digging in or resisting. When the base is stable the middle body (hips and waist) is agile and the arms and hands are light (relaxed) and sensitive, and so the foundation for the next stage of *Tàijí* practice, partner work, is established.

The Heaven Level

In the *Wang T’sung-Yueh* classic it states “From proficiency evolves into understanding the forces, from understanding the force precedes spiritual clarity” (*Wang T’sung-Yueh* classic). This will be achieved when the practitioner understands the external and internal changes in the *Tàijíquán* form. The ability to understand small changes within the body and in movement dictates the level of refinement of one’s *Tàijíquán* practice.

Understanding the forces and spiritual clarity involve your own as well as those of your opponent or training partner. When you are able to experience all the principles from the *Tàijí* classics regarding the forms, and you understand the movements of the *Tàijí* form, then you have achieved the understanding of the forces and a spiritual clarity of yourself.



12. The Application of *Tàijíquán*

If the body of *Tàijíquán* is the *Tàijí* form, then the application of *Tàijíquán* is in the pushing-hands. In all pushing-hands you have the forward movement, backward movement, turning left, turning right and the central equilibrium and they are the external representation of the five elements. Pushing-hands also cultivates the internal qualities of the five elements, namely sticking, joining, adhering, following, non-resistance and non-disconnection. If the internal qualities of the five elements are not present, then it is not *Tàijí* pushing-hands. It is important to remember however, that the foundation for developing the internal qualities of the five elements is in relaxation and sinking, which in turn are cultivated in the *Tàijí* form.

Sticking in *Tàijí* is indirect sticking, in that you stick with your mind and relaxed force, which can only happen if you are relaxed and sink. Sticking in *Tàijí* is like having a magnet and you use it to stick to a piece of metal and lift it off the table. In *Tàijí* you stick (with your mind and relaxed force) to the root of your opponent so they are disconnected from the ground. Joining is where you and opponent become one, there are no longer two individuals. Adhering is where they can't get rid of you, and you are like their shadow. Following is to give up your own opinion and go along with whatever your opponent wants to do (but without giving up your central equilibrium). Resisting is to go against the opponent's force, and to disconnect is to lose contact. When you come to make contact with your opponent you must offer them sticking, joining and adhering, following, non-resisting and not disconnecting. To do the opposite is against the *Tàijí* principles. Only when you have cultivated the internal qualities of the five elements will you then have the foundation to develop listening. When you can listen, you can yield and neutralise and know your chances.



13. The Art of Partner work in *Tàijíquán*

This aspect of *Tàijí* training is often called pushing-hands among today's *Tàijí* practitioners, but in the old days it was known as an exercise to sense and feel, and for some unknown reason it later became known as pushing-hands.

Pushing-hands is actually a very misleading term because different words imply different actions, for example the word 'run' immediately makes you think of running, you use your legs to run. With 'kick' you will use your legs to kick and with 'push' you will use your hands to push. If you read through the *Tàijí* classics there is not a single word about pushing. Even the classic The Song of *Tuīshǒu* (Pushing-hands) is incorrectly translated into English, and according to the Chinese characters it should be The Song of Hitting Hands. There is no pushing in *Tàijí*, only *fājìn*, the issuing of relaxed force. When you think of pushing you use your hands and when you think of *fājìn* you will use your legs and the *Chang San-Feng* classic clearly states "The root [of the relaxed force] is in the feet, discharged through the legs, controlled by the waist and expressed through to the fingers"). Cheng Man Ching said that when you push it should be as if pushing with your legs. Therefore in my teaching I am using the term 'partner work' instead of 'pushing-hands' to get the students out of the concept of pushing and of using the hands. The function of the hands in *Tàijí* is to stick, adhere, listen (sense) and to express the relaxed force. The arms and hands should always be light (relaxed).

The structure (the way that you move and change) externally and internally, and the experience of relaxation, sinking and issuing of the relaxed force that were cultivated in the *Tàijíquán* form must be present and experienced in the partner work. If one does not experience the same changes in the partner work then the

structure is broken. It is just like you have made a wine glass and when someone offers you the wine, you break the glass and try to receive the wine.

The foundation is “to give up yourself and follow the other” (from the Wang Ts’ung-Yueh classic). My Teacher Huang Sheng Shyan always said “Give up yourself and follow the other without objective opinions, flow with your heart (*xīn*) and let it be natural”. To ‘follow the other’ you must accept them completely, and the *Tàijí* form gives you a structure to do that, but the difficult part is to accept the other not only physically but also mentally. To be able to do this you have to know how to “give up yourself”, but what to give up? The first thing is to give up the concept of using brute force. In the ten important points of the Yang family it states “Use your mind, not brute force.” The next thing to give up is one’s ego and objective opinions, and by doing so you are then prepared to receive and be in harmony with your opponent and their force. The only thing you must not give up is your centre of equilibrium. One must “follow the other” but must not follow blindly. You follow the opponent initially until they have made a commitment and then you take over the role of leading and this is the meaning of first being motivated and then becoming the motivator.

When you witness a *Tàijí* competition in pushing-hands, or free pushing in a *Tàijí* class, you will most likely see both practitioners lock into what looks like a wrestling match with all the *Tàijí* principles thrown out of the window. It is because they fail to understand this principle from the *Wang T’sung-Yueh* classic: “Someone after years of dedicated practice being unable to adjust or neutralise, and is easily defeated by others, has not understood the fault of double heaviness”. To avoid this fault, you must understand the harmony between yin and yang. This will lead to understanding the forces (*dǒngjìn*)”.

Most practitioners misunderstand the term “double heaviness” and make yin and yang into something mysterious. Double heaviness has been mistranslated in all English *Tàijí* books to mean ‘double weight’, and a lot of Chinese *Tàijí* practitioners also have the same misconception. Therefore it is most commonly (mis)understood that if you have equal weight distribution on both feet then you commit the fault of double weight (double heaviness). Double heaviness is a major fault in the practice of *Tàijíquán*, but if it really were about weight distribution then the fault is committed in the very beginning posture of the form, as well as in the posture of cross hands and at any point in a transition where the weight is

equal in both feet. To clear up this misunderstanding it is important to note that double heaviness is not about weight distribution at all; it is actually about *force* distribution in the body.

Yin and *yang* are terms used to describe two opposite things that relate to each other. They could be right and left, up and down, internal and external, positive and negative or male and female, but in this context we are referring to substantial and insubstantial. Wherever there is force it is known as substantial (*yang*) and wherever there is no force it is known as insubstantial (*yin*). The Chang San-Feng classic states “In every part of the body there is both substantial and insubstantial. The principle of substantial and insubstantial applies to every situation”. One must understand that substantial and insubstantial has no fixed time or place and it changes with the movement of the body.

Whenever there is an incoming force and you meet it with force then that is ‘double heaviness’. Alternatively, when there is an incoming force and you yield and flow with it, this is the meaning of harmony of yin and yang. When both parties have no force it is known as double lightness and in *Tàijí* this is not a fault. In the partner work when an opponent’s force coming in, then wherever the force lands must instantly become insubstantial, or in other words you must soften at the point of contact. Again, this is the meaning of harmony of yin and yang (substantial and insubstantial should be clearly differentiated). The principle of “when the opponent is hard (strong) I become supple; this is yielding.” is referring to the harmony of yin and yang and when this principle is fully understood the practitioner will not fall into the fault of double heaviness.

Yielding is not about running away from the force or brushing it away, as that would be disconnection. Yielding is the ability to accept and receive the force without resisting it and the ability to do that will enable the practitioner to always be in an advantageous position. How much force do we allow to be on our structure (body) before we yield, some say four ounces of force but I believe even four ounces is still too much. In the *Wang T’sung-Yueh* classic it says that “a feather cannot be added; a fly cannot settle”, and therefore as long as the force is heavier than a feather or a fly we must yield to it. One of the ten important of Yang family says “I am not a meat rack”. A meat rack is where you hang the meat and therefore you must not allow your opponent’s body-weight to be on you (you

are not a meat rack) nor do you allow your body-weight to be on your opponent (he is also not a meat rack).

The Song of Hitting Hands says “Stick, connect, adhere, follow without disconnecting or resisting”. To stick is to make the first contact and to adhere is not to lose contact, so when you are able to stick and adhere then you will be able to follow. Yielding is like sitting back in the *Tàijí* form and following is like moving forward in the *Tàijí* form. The first level of sticking is to stick at the point of contact, the second level is sticking to the centre of gravity of your opponent and the highest level is to stick to the root of your opponent. If one understands the principle of yielding to an incoming force and flowing with the back of the force, then there will be no resisting or disconnecting.

In most free partner work (free pushing-hands) situations we observe practitioners using all their strength (even the strength of sucking the milk from the breast, when they were an infant). But the *Wang Tsung-Yueh* classic *Tàijí* classic says “Considering the verse; Only four tael are required to neutralise a thousand catty of force” shows that victory is not due to superior strength. In the Song of Hitting hands it also says “Let him use immense li (brute strength) to hit me. Lead his movements with only four tael to neutralise a thousand catty of force”. So this shows it is not about who is strongest and there should no fear of brute force, but how to neutralise a thousand catties force with four tael?

“Draw him into emptiness, gather (the force) then send it out.” This is the method to apply the principle of using four tael to deflect a thousand catties. One cannot draw the opponent into emptiness while resisting against an incoming force or holding it out, since this will only help to support the opponent’s balance and stability, keep them in their own circle and give them a structure to use. The foundation of ‘draw your opponent into emptiness’ is the ability to receive and accept the opponent’s force and pushes. It is also the foundation of yielding and neutralising. However it is not about receiving and accepting the force on your body but to receive and accept the force and let it pass *through* your body and *through* the feet into the ground using the process of sinking. As Cheng Man Ching says the body has a limited space, but the earth’s space is practically limitless. By receiving and accepting the opponent’s force into the ground you cause him to over commit himself and, in doing so, draw them out of their circle (centre). You can then work with them within your own circle, and the chance of

their root being disconnected is much greater. The greatest pleasure of drawing your opponent into emptiness is that you do not impose the push on them, but that they bring the chance of pushing (issuing) to you.

There is a difference between drawing an opponent into emptiness and sitting back and extending the force. In sitting back and extending the force you will only weaken it and the opponent is still in connection with his root. Therefore there is still plenty of time and distance for the opponent to adjust to the changes. Whereas drawing the opponent into emptiness creates a void that the opponent falls into, disconnecting him from his own root immediately, and giving very little time or space to adjust and respond.

The most common mentality of *Tàijí* practitioners when they engage in free partner work is they are always busy in looking for, and imposing pushes on, their partners. If one looks closely at the *Tàijí* classic it actually informs us when there are chances to issue (release, push). For example, The Understanding of the Thirteen Postures says “Seek the straight in the curve”, where straight represents issuing and the curve represents neutralising. It means the opportunities for issuing are to be found in the neutralising, because only in neutralising will the opponent be drawn into emptiness and his root will be disconnected and thus cannot easily change. In this way the chances of issuing are offered to you. As long as the opponent can move and change, it means that their root is still connected and they still have their central equilibrium, so don’t waste time or risk exposing yourself by imposing a push on them.

In the free partner work, whether yielding and neutralising or following and issuing, one should never move only in straight line or turn in only one direction. As the *Tàijí* classic The Understanding of The Thirteen Postures says “In advancing and retreating there should be a change of direction”, the change of direction is motivated by the hips and waist in relation to the changes of one’s base (legs). Also the principles “The source of life (movement) is in the waist area”, and “Every moment keep your awareness in the waist” from the Song of Thirteen Postures stress the important the waist (hips) plays in the changes of direction. However it is not that one completes a movement in one direction before changing to the next direction. It is always in the middle of one direction that one changes to next, and in the middle of that one changes to the third direction, and so on. So it

is always a change in multiple circles, and in this way the opponent's pushes will always fall into emptiness.

In most pushing-hands situations we will observe the practitioner's palms fixed at one point; if it is not under the elbows of one it will be on the arms of the other, and throughout the sticking and adhering the contact points never seem to change. This error is called "dead hands" because they remain at the same spot, are not lively and do not change in harmony with the changes in situation. We must understand that because the opponent's centre of gravity, substantiality and insubstantiality change with their movements, then one must also change the contact points according to the situation, and so give the hands "life". Professor Cheng Man Ching said, in the Song of Substance and Function, "The whole body functions as the hands. The hands are not (the only) hands". To apply this, one must follow the principle of "In moving forwards and backwards, there must be folding". It means that when the palms are neutralised then the lower arms follow, when the lower arms are neutralised the elbows follow, when the elbows are neutralised the shoulders follow and when the shoulders are neutralised the body follows. However there is no fixed rule to the order of changes, it depends on the situation.

14. *Fājìn* - Discharging or Releasing the Relaxed Force

The common mistake of most *Tàijí* practitioners in *tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) is pushing the opponents. There is no pushing in *Tàijí*; you only propel your opponent, causing them to fly off, by discharging your relaxed force (*jìn*). When you push your opponent, they will only stagger back, but if you propel them by discharging your relaxed force then both of their feet will be uprooted off the ground and they will fly off a great distance. If you are stiff and tense then there will not be any relaxed force. Trying to discharge relaxed force while you are stiff and tense is just like planting an apple tree in the garden and hoping you will see peaches growing on it; it will never happen. As the name "relaxed force" suggests, you can only have relaxed force if you are relaxed. It is stated in the Understanding of The Thirteen Postures, "When discharging the relaxed force (*jìn*), one must be completely and thoroughly relaxed and sink, and focus in one direction." Note the emphasis on completely and thoroughly relaxing!

When you think of pushing you will push with your hands, but the relaxed force is discharged from the legs, not from the hands. As Grandmaster Cheng Man Ching said, issue as if you are issuing with your legs. The *Chang San Feng Tàijí* classic states, "The root is in your feet, release through your legs, control by the waist and express through the fingers." In the discharging of the relaxed force one should not lose the connection of the feet, hence the root is in the feet and the root comes from sinking. Therefore you must be thoroughly relaxed and sink! The direction of the force is controlled by turning the hips and waist, and then from the fingers it is sent into your opponent.

The first experience a *Tàijí* practitioner has of the *fājìn* (discharge of relaxed force) is in the *Tàijí* form. At the end of every posture in the form, and before the beginning of the next posture, there is a releasing of relaxed force in the posture.

The practitioner must remember the experience and the feeling at the moment of release, and seek the same feeling when practicing *fājìn* in pushing-hands.



In the Understanding of the Thirteen Postures it states, "First absorb, then release." Like a spring, there must first be compression before you have rebounding force. The legs are just like a spring and, like animals taking a leap, they first drop their legs to produce a spring like force in order to leap. In the same *Tàijí* classic it says, "Absorb the force like drawing the bow." Before you shoot an arrow you first have to draw the string of the bow to create a spring force to send the arrow out. The legs are the string of the bow and dropping the legs is drawing the string of the bow. The same classic also states, "discharging the force like shooting an arrow." When you shoot an arrow the bow does not move. Similarly, when you discharge the force your body (bow) does not lean or move forward. When you shoot an arrow, you do not focus at the arrow (your opponent), you focus beyond the arrow at the target, hence the meaning of focus in one direction. The best analysis of the force being discharged from the legs and not the hands was described by Teacher Huang Sheng Shyan. He said, "your hands are like radar detecting enemy aircraft. Your legs are like a surface to air missile. When you have detected the enemy aircraft you do not throw the radar at the plane, you fire the missile at them."

15. Yielding and Neutralising

The fear of being pushed, and the desire to push, both result in the *Tàijí tuīshǒu* (pushing-hands) turning into a wrestling match. The main obstacle to being able to yield and neutralise is one's ego. In the beginning one has to yield first before being able to neutralise. Yielding is to extend the incoming force and change its direction, and neutralising is to nullify the force so that it is no longer acting on you.

The importance of yielding is greatly emphasised by the late *Tàijí* grandmaster Professor Cheng Man Ching who famously said, "Invest in loss." When my late Teacher Huang Sheng Shyan studied *Tàijí* under Professor Cheng, Teacher Huang was already an accomplished White Crane master. Professor Cheng accepted Teacher Huang as his student only if he agreed to a condition of yielding and not pushing; not to even think of pushing for four years; a condition which Teacher Huang readily accepted.

In the Wang Ts'ung-Yueh *Tàijí* classic it says "Give up yourself, follow the other.", and this concept is the foundation for yielding. One has to give up the ego, one's own self and one's opinions in order to yield, and this is the main difference between *Tàijí* and other martial arts. Most martial arts teach you to overcome others while in *Tàijí* you have to overcome yourself to be good. Yielding is about accepting your opponent and accommodating them. How much force should you allow to be on you before you yield? The Wang Ts'ung-Yueh *Tàijí* classic says "A feather cannot be added, a fly cannot settle." So, as long as the force is heavier than a feather or fly you must yield to it. Yielding is not moving away from the force; that would be disconnection. Yielding is just like when you push into a sponge, where the sponge only moves as much as you push, and it does not move

more than you push. Similarly, it is the feather or the fly (the force) which sets you in motion, and it is not that you move away from it. No matter where or how strong the force is on you, your yielding must be a whole-body synchronization not a regional movement. In the same classic it states, “When the opponent is hard I am subtle, that is yielding.” Only with yielding one can avoid committing the mistake of double heaviness.

“Seek the straight in the curve” it says in The Understanding of the Thirteen Postures. Straight is attacking, whereas the curve is yielding and neutralising. You will find your chances of attacking in the yielding and neutralising. The only method of applying the *Tàijí* principle of leading four ounces to deflect a thousand pounds, is to draw the opponent into emptiness. One must have the ability to accept and accommodate (yield to) the opponent’s force to be able to draw them into emptiness. After yielding, when the incoming force is weakened, one must nullify the force by accepting it not onto the body but bring it through the body and into the ground. The process of bringing the force into the ground is the same as the sinking process in the *Tàijí* form. In the end, yielding and neutralising become one.

Everybody knows how to yield. Just treat the incoming force as if it were a sharp knife, then you will naturally know how to yield. Professor Cheng said, “Invest in loss, loss is gain and gain is loss.” Is just like the person pushing is giving out *Tàijí* money and the person who is yielding is accepting *Tàijí* money. As time pass, the person pushing gets poorer and the person yielding gets richer. Teacher Huang says “the more you fall, the better you become.” In the first five hundreds time you are pushed, you do not know why you get pushed out. On the eight hundredth time you are pushed, you start to realize where you are stuck but you still get pushed out. In the one thousandth time you get pushed, you know where you are stuck, but now you are able to become unstuck, yield and neutralise, and so now the situation belongs to you. However, when you “Give up yourself,” you should never give up your central of equilibrium. Similarly, when you “Follow the other” you should never follow blindly. Instead yield when the force is coming into you and, once your opponent has committed themselves and their force has been neutralised, you must take over the lead and counter attack. In this way you are first being motivated, but then become the motivator, and this is the meaning of “Seek the straight in the curve.”

When you get used to being pushed, you start to feel that being pushed is not a big deal. You will lose the fear of being pushed and will be relaxed, then you will be able to stick, join, adhere and follow, not resisting and not disconnecting in pushing-hands. Equipped with these attributes, you can go on to develop a level of sensing (listening force) in *Tàijí* pushing-hands.

16. *Tàijíquán* - The Art of Receiving

Tàijíquán is no different from any other exercise or martial art if it is practiced without understanding the principles and without putting the principles into the movements. Regardless of the various different *Tàijí* styles or *Tàijí* forms, they are all based on the same set of *Tàijí* classical texts. They are: The *Chang Sang Feng Tàijí* Classic, The *Wang Ts'ung Yueh Tàijí* Classic, The Song of Thirteen Postures, The Understanding of the Thirteen Postures, The Song of Substance and Function, The Song of Pushing-hands and, in the case of the Yang style, The Ten Important Points of the Yang Family. Practitioners should put the principles into the movements, rather than going into the movements to look for the principles.



To put the principles into the movements, the practitioner must constantly read and understand the classics and, when practicing, the mind must ‘ask’ and the body must ‘answer’ (respond).

The foundation of *Tàijíquán* practice is in the *Tàijí* form. By neglecting the *Tàijí* form and only focusing on pushing-hands, it is like working on the function (application) without the substance (body). By knowing yourself and knowing your opponent you will excel in pushing-hands. Knowing yourself comes from the practice of the *Tàijí* form, where you learn to be relaxed, balanced, connected and synchronised without any external forces affecting you. The relaxed force of *Tàijí* is cultivated and developed in the practice of the *Tàijí* form.

In the *Chang Sang Feng* classic it is stated, “At the moment of movement, the body should be light, agile and most importantly connected (synchronised)”. To achieve this, the central equilibrium must be maintained in position, in transition and in the release of the force, both in the *Tàijí* form and in pushing-hands. To maintain the central equilibrium the practitioner has to keep in mind the following principles: The Song of Thirteen Postures”, Tuck in the tailbone and keep a consciousness on the crown of the head (*bǎihui* meridian point), the body will be agile if the head is held as if suspended from the top. ”The Wang Tsung Yueh *Tàijí* Classic, “Do not tilt or lean. Stand like a level scale”. Only when the central equilibrium has been achieved, can one talk about changes and relaxation. The central equilibrium is the foundation of *Tàijíquán*. It is one of *Tàijí*’s ‘Thirteen Postures’ and all the other twelve postures must have the central equilibrium within them.

The practice of the *Tàijí* form is not about whether you know the whole form, nor is it measured by the number of different *Tàijí* forms or styles you know. It is about putting the principles into the form and understanding the movements in the form. The *Tàijí* form is only a tool for you to transfer the principles from the *Tàijí* Classics into your body, and eventually the form should become formless because any movement you make should have the principles within it.

Besides having the *Tàijí* principles, the practitioner must also understand the movements in the form. After learning the whole form the practitioner must seek to understand the sequence of changes that creates the movements and get the sequences to change in relation to each other, and in so doing, achieving the principle that is stated in the Understanding of The Thirteen Postures, “Remember, keep this in your heart, when you move every part of your body moves, when you

settle every parts settles”. In different postures in the *Tàijí* form, the arms, the legs and the body might be in different positions and you might face different directions, but the sequence of changes and what happens in it is the same. That is why the great *Tàijí* teachers of the past always say, “when you understand one movement, you understand all the movements”. In fact the most effective way of practicing the form is the single posture practice.

The changes within any movement always begin from the base (feet, ankles, knees and hips joints) and the letting go of excess tension from the calves and thighs muscles. The base creates the body (trunk) movements - the relaxation of the chest from within, the melting sensation of the body muscles and the letting go of excess tension from the upper, middle and lower back, creating movements in the back. The body creates the arm movements – the sinking of the shoulders and dropping of the elbows. The movement of the body comes from mind cultivation, so the mind awareness must be in the body to imagine and visualise the body’s movements happening. After prolonged cultivation the movements will materialise. The base and the arm movements will only be connected if there are movements in the body, otherwise they are only coordinated.

Relaxation in the *Tàijí* Form:

There is a difference between relaxation and being ‘soft and floppy’. “*fàngsōng*” (relaxation in Chinese) means to ‘let go’. To let go of what?, to let go any unnecessary tension in the posture (body) and movements. In *Tàijí* we use the minimum amount of tension to sustain postures and movements, anything more than is necessary we call it tension. As our awareness of our body increases so does our ability to let go of unnecessary tension. When the upper body becomes lighter and the base become heavier, it is the sign of relaxation taking place. In the end, the upper body becomes yin and the base become yang and, when the practitioner reaches the highest level, only the feet are yang the rest of the body is *yin*.

Sinking:

Sinking is a mental process and it is very important in *Tàijí* practice. It can only come after the practitioner is able to relax. Sinking develops the root in *Tàijí*, to enable the practitioner to ‘borrow the energy from the earth’. Sinking is also a training to take any incoming forces into the ground (internal neutralising) in pushing-hands. The sinking should start from the *bǎihui* meridian point (crown of

the head), and this is to ‘swallow the *qì* of the heaven’. It should go through the body, legs and feet, through the bubbling well into the ground.

To borrow the energy from the earth, the practitioner must visualise the sinking awareness rebounding from the ground, travelling through the bubbling well, up through the legs, the body and the arms, past the *láoōng* meridian point and to the fingertips. When the practitioners master the *Tàijí* form, then they will have a structure to receive the forces in pushing-hands.

Pushing-hands:

In the old days it was known as an exercise of ‘sensing and feeling’, but somehow it was later called pushing-hands. Pushing-hands is a very misleading phrase because actually it has nothing to do with pushing and nothing to do with the hands. Most *Tàijí* pushing-hands we see is just like a wrestling match, or like two goats locking horns, using brute force and thus deviating from the *Tàijí* principles. The reasons are that one person wants to push, the other doesn’t want to be pushed. The bigger one uses his body weight and strength, while the smaller one tries to dig in to hold his ground. It always takes two hands to clap!

We have to look into the principles, understand them and then proceed into the practice. One of the Ten Important points of the Yang family says, “Use your mind ,not your brute force”, as long as you use your mind the door to *Tàijí* pushing-hands is open for you to enter; if you still want to use brute force it is just like locking the door and try to get in again. If you still want to use brute force, don’t come to learn *Tàijí* because even you have ten lifetimes you cannot achieve the essence of *Tàijí*.

In the Song of *Tuīshǒu* it says, “Let him use immense (brute) force to attack me” and “Lead his movements with only four *tael* to neutralise a thousand *catty* of force”. This clearly shows that a greater force will not stand a chance if it is dealt with using the *Tàijí* principles.

The foundation of *Tàijí* pushing-hands is receiving, not pushing, and the highest form of *Tàijí* force is the Receiving Force (*jièjìn*), and so therefore the practice of receiving should start from the beginning. Professor *Cheng Man Ching* said that “If you are not prepared to receive (incoming force) do not come to learn *Tàijí* because you will be wasting your time in your lifetime you will not get the essence of *Tàijí*”. In the *Wang Tsung Yueh Tàijí* classic it is stated, “A feather cannot be

added, a fly cannot settle” and in the Ten Important Points of Yang family it says, “I am not a meat rack”. All of these points emphasise that you should receive and accept the forces, not resist against them.

In the practice of Pushing-hands the body should have all the elements that are experienced in the *Tàijí* form. The key to receiving is to throw away self (ego) and invest in loss. “Invest in loss; small loss small gain, big loss, big gain”, what beautiful words spoken by Professor *Cheng Man Ching*. It seems that by receiving (yielding) you are losing but that is not the case because the person pushing is actually giving you “*Tàijí* money”. As he keeps pushing he gets poorer and as you keep receiving you get richer. When the day comes that he can no longer push you (that means he is *Tàijí* bankrupt), then perhaps you could give him some interest on the “*Tàijí* money” he gave you! In the beginning the practice of receiving can be very frustrating because you get pushed over all the time. As you progress you start to realise where you get stuck, and why, but you will still get pushed over because you can’t yet do anything about it. Gradually though, you learn how to ‘unstick’ yourself and take the force down into the ground. Receiving must be done with total acceptance, in the process of receiving if you have even the slightest intention or thought of countering, then it is receiving without total acceptance. When you master the art of receiving, you will be able to perform the principle that is stated in The Song of Pushing-hands, “Draw him into emptiness, gather the force and send it out”.

Receiving (yielding and neutralising) is not to receive the oncoming force on to the body as the body has only a limited capacity to absorb the force, but to take it into the earth, which has a relatively limitless capacity. The process of receiving the force into the earth is similar to the sinking process in the *Tàijí* form except that it starts at the point of contact [rather than the *baihui*].

The upper body is yin and the base is yang, so any adjustment to incoming movements and forces must begin from the base and, as in the *Tàijí* form, the body and arms follow the changes of the base. The hands are used only to stick to the opponent, and at any chance to release your force it should be released through the legs with the feet remaining firmly grounded to the earth. As it is stated in the *Chang San Feng Tàijí* classic, “The root is in the feet, discharged through the legs (relaxed force), controlled by the waist (direction) and expressed into the fingers”. No matter how big or small the issuing is, the hands never

extend more than a space of one inch (the extension is only the result of sinking the shoulders).

In pushing-hands, you do not go into it to look for a push or plan to set up a chance to push, you just follow the changes of your opponent and let the push happen by itself. If there is a will to push, then there will be intention and desire. 'In the principle everything is base on the principle of yin and yang. When the yin reaches its extreme it will become yang and vice versa. So whenever you think you are in the most advantageous position you are actually in the process of going into a disadvantaged position and whenever you are in a most disadvantaged position you are in the process of going to an advantageous position. It is always better to change from a disadvantage to an advantaged position, rather than the other way around. When you reach the highest level of pushing-hands, there are no pushes from you. Your body structure is an empty void and any force that comes into contact with it travels into the earth and rebounds back, returning to the person issuing the force. This is the highest level of *Tàijí* force, the Receiving Force, where the practitioner neutralises without neutralising and issues without issuing. To attain this level one must be able to "Forget yourself and follow the other without your own opinion, follow the heart and mind and let it be natural".

To borrow the words of Professor Cheng Man Ching when speaking about pushing-hands, "It is an idea without motives, an act without desire. What a wonderful art *Tàijí* is; it has nothing to do with pushing, it is all about receiving". As practitioners of *Tàijíquán* we should be true to the art, not only preaching the principles, but also practicing and adhering to them. *Tàijí* is not only an exercise for health or a martial art for self-defence, it is most importantly the Dao (philosophy) of life.

17. My *Tàijí* Journey

It all began in early 1980 when I was holidaying in Taipei, Taiwan. I was staying in the house of Mr Hii the brother-in-law of my sister's godmother. Mr Hii is a *Tàijí* practitioner; he would wake up every morning at 5am and go to the park to practice his *Tàijí* form and pushing-hands with fellow practitioners until 7:30am. I was in Taipei for a week and every morning I would follow him to the park and watch him doing his routine. I found the art of *Tàijí* fascinating and especially watching him pushing people much younger than him, effortlessly (he was 60 and retired). He spoke of a famous *Tàijí* practitioner by the name of Huang Sheng Shyan who lived in Malaysia and has a *Tàijí* school in Malaysia and Singapore.

On returning to Singapore, and with the image of *Tàijí* still fresh in my mind, I started to look for the *Tàijí* school of Teacher Huang Sheng Shyan and found out that the Singapore Tai Chi Association was the school founded by him, and they had a number of different training centres. I went to the main school at Geylang Road to road to enrol (6 months later the school was moved to its present premises at Public Mansion Building on Balestier Road) and was told by the instructor to put my name down and come back in a month time when the new class would start.

At the first lesson, all the students came dressed in a track suit and t-shirt and were required to buy the *Tàijí* school uniform, which is white loose cotton pants and a white t-shirt. After the first lesson, with sweat pouring over my body (32 degrees Celsius in the evening), I realised that *Tàijí* is really not as easy as it looks. The slow movements were very deceiving and it was actually very demanding on the legs indeed, yet we were not even training in the form, only the first relaxing exercise!

I continued to attend my class, twice a week, Monday and Wednesday from 7pm to 8:30pm. But it was only after 3 months in the school that I found out it opens at 5pm and close at 10pm with other classes running. So I began to arrive earlier, at 5pm, and do my own practice before the start of my class and then stay back to practice until the school closed at 10pm. After six months in the school, one of the senior instructors told me the school runs from Monday to Friday and if I wished I could come every day, and of course I did not hesitate to accept the offer.

My first instructor was Mr Lee Yuan Wan, who was focussed very much on the accuracy of the forms. The other instructors in the school were also very helpful, and if one had any question about practice they were more than happy to help. Mr Chong Chih Pin, one of Teacher Huang's early students, was also an instructor in the school and helped me a lot in explaining the principles of *Tàijí*, and I could say it is because of his influence that I have always focused on the *Tàijí* classics in my own practice. As I got to know the instructors better, I was invited to stay for supper after training. After class it was customary for the instructors to take turns to cook supper, and then they would all eat before heading home. I was in the catering business at the time, so I would also bring dishes of food from the canteen as a contribution to the nightly supper.

It was also at the Singapore school that I first met my good friend Patrick Kelly, because he always stopped by the Singapore school on his way to Malaysia to meet and train with Teacher Huang. After a year at the school, I was invited to join the Sunday morning training by the head instructor of the School, Mr Seah Mok Tai whose *Tàijí* skill was considerably higher than the other instructors. He contributed greatly to the Singapore school and I am very grateful to him as he passed on a lot of his knowledge of *Tàijí* in the Sunday class. He is also Teacher Huang's oldest disciple both in years and age (about 4 years younger than Teacher Huang). In his later years he had some disagreement with Teacher Huang and because of the politics in the school, he left. Sadly he passed away only one month after teacher's Huang death.

I always heard the instructors comment on how good Teacher Huang's *Tàijí* skill was. At that time I had this thought in my mind; he is a human being and I am also a human being, so if I get the correct guidance and put in the effort, logically I could become as good as him. But of course now the most important thing

is I enjoy the art. In those days I had a routine before the class started. When I arrived I would look at the photograph of Teacher Huang on the wall in the school, and tell myself that one day I am going to learn directly under him. At that time, he would come to visit the Singapore school once a month, or sometimes once every two months, for three or four days at a time. I think that he must have noticed me, because every time when he visited Singapore and he saw me practicing he would come up to me and say "young man, everything is in the *Tàijí* form". I said to myself "the *Tàijí* form must be important otherwise he wouldn't keep repeating the same sentence to me".

One day, after I had been training for almost two years in the school, Teacher Huang was visiting, he approached me and ask me if I could come up to Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) in a month's time to give a helping hand. The Kuala Lumpur school was having its tenth anniversary celebration and it was at this celebration that I first saw Ben Low and Robert Smith, but of course I was a small fry then (and I still am a small fry now) so no-one took much notice of me. About one week before the celebration we had to move about one thousand copies of the anniversary magazine, each about two inches thick, and had to put the school stamp on every one of them; a task that took four of us, myself, a student from Taiwan and two instructors from the Kuala Lumpur school, a long time.



It was then that I heard that after the celebration Teacher Huang was going to retire from active teaching and move back to Kuching in Sarawak, East Malaysia. One evening, before the celebration, I approached him and told him of my wish to study under him for two years. He looked up at me, smiled and said, “Two years is not enough, if you are really keen you need four years.” I told him that’s no problem but I first needed to go back to Singapore to sort my affairs. Back in Singapore I told my mother I planned to leave the catering business, and of my decision to study *Tàijí*. She was not so happy about my decision, but my dad was very supportive, and he said, “You don’t have to be in the catering line but whatever you do decide to do, be good at it.” My friends of course, thought that I was crazy.



Arriving in Kuching

Two months later I flew into Kuching, and was met at the airport by the Kuching school instructor. On arriving at Teacher Huang’s house, the first think he told me is “Young man, don’t think about *gōngfū*, no matter how fast and effective you are, you will not be as fast and effective as a bullet. Treat *Tàijí* as an art and enjoy it as an art”. I asked him about the payment of school fees, food and lodging for my four years stay. He smiled and said that I didn’t have to pay him a single cent,

as long as I studied the art of *Tàijí* diligently and propagated it, that in itself was payment enough.

The first time we went out in a car that was driven by Teacher Huang was very nerve racking. He would change gear and step on the accelerator without completely letting go of the clutch and would change lane frequently without looking in the rear mirror, to the distinct annoyance of other drivers. After this experience, I asked him how he managed to get his driver’s licence, and he explained that the tester happened to be his student. I suggested to him that I would be his driver from now on and would also cook his meals. He accepted the offer, but arranged to have someone else come in to clean the house and do the laundry.

For the first week, apart from doing the up and down movement, there was no other training. Most of the time I was sorting through loads of photo albums, and probably thousands of photographs, and rearranging them for him. Of course, I was not really happy because I was there to do *Tàijí* not stack photos, but as I knew that he was a good teacher, I told myself to be patient. Later I realised that he was already training me, and although initially I had been frustrated, I later took it in my stride. As I became more patient, I also became more relaxed and my *qì* would naturally sink. As the Chinese saying goes, “When the heart is in balance, the *qì* will be in harmony”. Later, Teacher Huang told me that the reason he asks anyone that comes to Kuching for training to do housework for the first few days, is so that he can study their character.

It was during one of these this photo arrangement sessions that I saw him standing with his palm stuck to the washing basin (it was a portable basin that we used to wash our face in the morning, about one foot in diameter and six inches depth) four feet off the floor! I was amazed and asked him about it. He got a basin from the bathroom, filled it with water and put his right palm into the basin and stirred the water. Less than a minute later his palm was stuck to the face of the basin and he lifted it off the table. Later he told me that it was not good to do it very often, especially when you are over seventy as it used up a lot of body energy. One of his other abilities was that he could put his arm on the table, and when you felt the arm, it was really soft, but even using both hands you couldn’t ever lift it off the table.

Beginning of the Training

After a week, Teacher Huang gave me a timetable for training, starting with the first session from 4am to 8:30am in the morning. I would do my own training from 4am until 6:30am when he usually came from his room to train. The second session was from 3pm to 5pm, and usually it would be self-practice but occasionally he will come over to check. Then at 5:30 pm I would join a group of thirteen senior students in their class, which was also held in Teacher Huang's house. Most of them were older students of teacher, and they were all businessmen, doing it mainly for health. That was except for Mr Yek who was very serious in his training and one of the best students Teacher Huang had at that time. He was also the leader of the group.

The last training was from 8:30pm to 9:30 pm and was the Fujian White Crane session. Teacher Huang wanted me to learn and propagate White Crane as well, because he felt that he was being unfair to his White Crane teachers if we only concentrated on promoting *Tàijí* and not White Crane. Most of his early students in the fifties and the sixties also learned White Crane from him. He told me that Fujian White Crane and *Tàijí* shared the same principles, but that *Tàijí* was more refined, rather like the difference between an uncut diamond (White Crane) and polished diamond (*Tàijí*).

In the first *Tàijí* lesson he told me that although I had learned the exercises, both the short and long *Tàijí* forms and pushing-hands in his school, that I should forget all that I had learned and start again from the very beginning, and only practice the movements as he taught me.

For the first six months of my stay he only taught me using his native dialect (Fuzhou) and I initially didn't understand a single word of it and I had to ask the seniors students for explanations. Most of his senior students in Kuching understood his dialect. After six months I was just beginning to understand his dialect, and he then began to teach in Mandarin! Mandarin is the common language of the Chinese people. However, I realised that in a sentence of ten or so words, it would contain of at least four words in his dialect - he had completely mixed up both languages. He said that "if you don't understand what I say you will not be able to learn my art" and this was illustrated on a number of occasions. Once when we had a centralised training at his house, a lady student come into the kitchen and said that Teacher Huang wanted a coconut. I told her that what

Teacher Huang actually wanted was a round stool not a coconut. In his dialect the word for 'stool' sounds like the word for 'coconut' in Mandarin. Sometimes in the meeting of the committee of different branches of the school he will begin speaking in Mandarin, but when he got excited he would switch to his dialect and everybody at the meeting had to remind him to speak in Mandarin. It is very important to be able to understand a teacher to learn from him. It also happened to me with some of my own students for example when I was in Germany teaching a group the fixed push hand exercise of 'ward-off, roll-back, press and push' one of the newer students asked an older student why did I keep saying "ward-off, roll-back, President Bush", which of course gave us all quite a giggle at the time. It took another student three years to finally understand me when I said "central equilibrium".



The Training methods of Teacher Huang

I spent eight months, repeatedly working from the beginning of the *Tàijí* form to the first Grasp the Sparrow's tail. Teacher Huang kept emphasising that the essence of the *Tàijí* form is in the Grasp the Sparrow's tail, just as the essence of Fujian White Crane was in the *San Chin*. He stressed that if you can experience

the principles in this portion of the form, you will be able to experience it in all the movements in the whole Form. He always emphasised that *Tàijí* is not about learning different movements but it is about the ability to experience the principles within the movements. When I felt that I got a movement correct, he would show me a little more detail of the movement that I was working on and highlighted the importance of looking for the movements contained within the movement. One of his favourite sayings was, “Do not just know what has happened, you must know how it happened”.

For the first month I had to do the up and down movement, the five relaxing exercises and the *Tàijí* Form with an empty match box on my head. This was to train the principle of having a light consciousness on the crown of the head at all times. If my chin was jutting out he would come over and without warning he would use his long thumbnail to push it back in.

Often when I was practicing the *Tàijí* Form he would come from behind and push my heel with his foot. Later he told me that if my sinking is not in the feet or into the ground then my heels will be easily moved. Every time he taught me a movement, he would ask me to feel his body while he was doing it. He would then say, “ Visualise the movements that you feel on my body happening in your own but do not use muscular force to make it happen”.

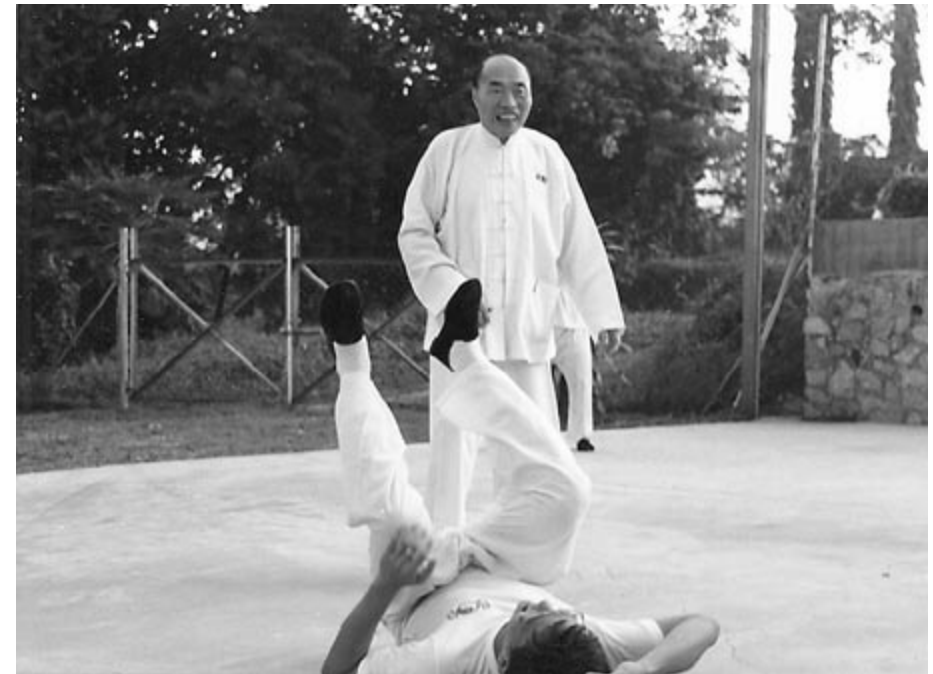
The worst part of the training was pushing-hands, if I was leaning forward, he would give me a slap on my face and then ask me why I was offering my head for him to slap! If I resisted against an incoming force he would drop me onto the floor with a downward force when we were training in the living room, or send me flying onto the concrete bench when we were training in the courtyard.

To train the issuing of the force, I split my time between pushing the air, pushing the wall and pushing a fifty kilo sandbag. The sandbag was hung from a bar by two thick chains so that when you pushed the sand bag it would swing away, and then as it swung back, you had to accept the force and visualize transferring it into the ground, and then push the sandbag out again.

Sometimes the traditional teaching methods hurt, especially when you got hit for a making mistake. However because you quickly learnt not to repeat that mistake, it would only happen once or twice. Another hardship with traditional training was that you couldn't take a break unless the teacher said to. Often my

legs would ache so much during the first eighteen months, that I had to hold on to the side of the wall to squat down to go to the toilet (his house had only a squatting toilet).

I remember Mr Yek (Sing Ong) told me that I had come to study with Teacher Huang at just the right time, because he had refined his *Tàijí* considerably and it was a period when he was most willing to impart his knowledge. According to Mr Yek, in his early days he was not as open in his teaching.



Learning to observe the *Tàijí* Form

Every so often during my stay in Kuching, the instructors from the different branches of the school plus students from overseas, would come together for training. At those times Teacher Huang would ask me to observe them practicing the first section of the form. Later in the evening before going to bed, I would spend an hour with him in his room. Usually he talked about the *Tàijí* classics and sometimes he would tell stories of his younger days including about when he was a guerrilla fighting against the Japanese. Afterwards he would ask me what I had observed in the students' form, and then he would point out the things I

hadn't seen. The next day, when I observed the students I would look for things that Teacher Huang had pointed out.

On other occasions he would bring me along on his tours of his schools in Malaysia. When he went around the classes correcting the students, I would follow closely to observe how he corrected them. Sometimes I asked him why a student had a particular mistake. He pointed out that different students respond differently, and even though they may have the same mistake, he would not necessarily use the same method to correct them.

Back to Singapore

After four years, before going back to Singapore, I asked Teacher Huang for his permission to teach outside his school. He asked me why and I told him that I just wanted to teach and practice, and did not want to be caught up in the politics of the school, it. He agreed to my request.

When I was back in Singapore, the instructors of the Singapore school and my *Tàijí* friends thought that having spending four years with Teacher Huang, that my *Tàijí* must be good. I told them that the four years only gave me a better understanding of *Tàijí*, and although I may have learned a lot, it didn't mean that I had yet digested what I had learned. Besides, just because a teacher is good, it doesn't mean that all of his students will be good.

I was still going back to Kuching regularly for training, and when Teacher Huang came to Singapore I would stay with him in the Singapore school. That is why my wife who I met when I was in Kuching and married one year after being back in Singapore, always joked that when Teacher Huang was around she had no husband.

In 1989, at Patrick Kelly's invitation, Teacher Huang visited New Zealand and I went along. It was during this visit that Patrick came up with the idea of applying for New Zealand permanent residency for Teacher Huang and for me to be a co-applicant to assist him.

Although Teacher Huang had lived in Malaysia for thirty years, the Malaysian government hadn't granted him citizenship. So in 1991 after we received our New Zealand residency, I went to New Zealand with the plan that Teacher Huang would join me in July 1992. Unfortunately in April of that year Teacher Huang

was hospitalised. I flew back to Singapore to visit him, although for the first few days he remained in a coma. After he regained consciousness, he tried to talk to me but I couldn't understand him. So I gave him a pen and on my palm he wrote "*Tàijí*, relax and sink", and that was the last *Tàijí* advice he gave me. Later when I visited him that evening again he used his arms to show some Fujian White Crane form movements, and realising what he was getting at, I told him not to worry, that I would propagate the White Crane as well. Which is why I have taught it to my students Paul Fretter, Pete Dobson, Bob Honiball in the UK, and Hella Ebel in Germany. I also believe that my teacher may have had a premonition of his death, because about one year beforehand he repeatedly told me to learn as much as I could from him, as his time in this world was not long. Teacher Huang died in his hometown, Fuzhou China, in December 1992.

Meeting Teacher Sam Tam

About 16 years after my teacher's death I met teacher Sam Tam through my student Torben. One of Torben's students had attended a workshop of Teacher Sam and told Torben about him. When I saw a video clip of Teacher Sam's pushing-hands, I immediately recognised that this man was good and that he was really practising what he preached. It is not easy to find a *Tàijí* exponent like that, and especially one who is able to demonstrate the principles and applications of *Tàijí* practically. I immediately asked Torben to contact with. Initially I spoke with teacher Sam over the telephone; he was very friendly and we talked often. Later I asked his permission to go to Vancouver where he resides, to train under him. Teacher Sam is very open minded and genuine in his teaching, as he is over the phone. Even now he still addresses me as *Tàijí* brother but for me he is my teacher and I will always be his student. He is very soft in his yielding yet very powerful in his relaxed force. I visited him on five occasions but unfortunately due to personal circumstances I am not currently able to continue to visit. If the circumstances change I would certainly like to visit him again, as it is very rare to find a *Tàijí* teacher of this calibre. Although my visits to him were short, it enabled me to understand *Tàijí* from a different perspective which in turn enhanced my *Tàijí* and helped me in my development.

My introduction to Europe

In 1991 the Stichting *Tàijí* in the Netherlands invited Teacher Huang to give a seminar in Holland. One of the committee members, Erich Volke, had earlier visited Teacher Huang in the late eighties. My teacher declined the invitation because of his age and instead asked me to go on his behalf. That was how I began my Twenty years of association with *Tàijí* in Europe.

Lessons learned during my *Tàijí* journey

The first thing I realised was that there were a lot of professional instructors already in my teacher's school. Many of them had been performing *Tàijí* for a long time but their skill of *Tàijí* didn't seem what it could be. The problem I observed was that most treated it as a job, teaching but not training. I had learned that even if you teach you must still train, because when you teach you are teaching what the students should be doing, and when you train you are training what you should be doing. It is only through training that you discover new knowledge and improve.

There were people around my Teacher Huang who used words to flatter him, and some who tried to deny other students from getting close to him. I love and respect my teacher greatly but I do not idolise him, my relationship with him was more like father and son. There were things that I could bring up with him that other students wouldn't dare to. It is important as a teacher not to encourage Guru like worshipping because you will lose touch with reality. For students it is important not to idolise your teacher, because your teacher is only a human like you.

I also observed that for a number of my teacher's students, once they became inner disciples, they didn't train as hard as they had before. I think my teacher did notice, although in his later years he again actively encouraged the practice of taking inner disciples. It was in 1989 that I first witnessed the ceremony of inner discipleship. It was for two senior students, one from Seremban and the other from Singapore. At that time he told me I would go through the ceremony at a later date. I told him that the ceremony was not important, to me what was more important was that I learned his art, respected and loved him as a teacher. In the month before I left for New Zealand, he asked me to go to the Seremban school in Malaysia to go through the ceremony of discipleship. When I was there I found that not only was I being accepted as a disciple, but also as his adopted son.

Grumbling and deaf students

There were quite a large number of students in my teacher's school, and some of the instructors would complain that my teacher didn't impart his skill to them. When my teacher was explaining to the classes, some complained that he always repeated the same thing, or that he kept changing things. This group of students and instructors showed little or no improvement in their practice, and were being left behind in their *Tàijí*. Teacher Huang often said that the students do not give him a chance to teach. He also said when he teaches a student "step one", which the student doesn't practice, then they won't have a foundation for "two" so how can he continue to teach? For the students that complained that my teacher always repeated the same things, they had forgotten that the same things had a different meaning to each student and at different levels. They forget too that my teacher did not stop refining and sometimes movements have to change for refinement.

My wish as a *Tàijí* practitioner

As far as I'm concerned it isn't necessary to differentiate between the various styles of *Tàijí*. Whether it's Chen, Yang, Wu, Sun or Hoa or Cheng, they are all in accordance with the same principles contained in the *Tàijí* classics. Therefore *Tàijí* should be considered just *Tàijí*, regardless of what lineage you follow or what race you are, we are just human beings.

When I left for New Zealand one of my fellow students told me that I shouldn't teach the Westerners too much, and another said not to teach them too much too soon. What a selfish attitude and a complete contrast to Teacher Huang's teaching. He always stressed to teach all that you know and that in *Tàijí* Dao there are no race barriers. When you teach what you know, you will have space for new knowledge. Through practicing with your students you experience your knowledge, then it becomes wisdom. Importantly you should always give knowledge to the students when they are ready for it.

No student should claim that he is his teacher's only successor or that he is the only one that teaches what his teacher taught. All the students of the teacher are his successors. None of us can even claim that we are teaching our teacher's art. We can only say that we are teaching our understanding of what we were taught. We are not computers that are programmed to operate the same way or duplicate what was before. We are individuals with our own different minds and

emotions. Naturally our understanding of the same thing will differ and hence the difference in teaching and approach. But as long as it is within the *Tàijí* principles then it is correct. In the beginning you learn the external principles of the *Tàijí* and so your movements must be as close to your teacher's as possible. But once you go deeper into the internal principles and movements, your form will change. Your movements will have your own characteristics, so it will be slightly different from your teacher and your fellow students. If a student has been practicing *Tàijí* for twenty or thirty years and claims that their *Tàijí* form is identical to their teacher's, then I think that's sad because they may have only copied their teacher and not developed the art any further.

Throughout the history of *Tàijíquán* we can see students have refined, changed and some even progressed beyond their teacher. Yang Lu Chang developed his own style after studying with Chen Chang Hsin of the Chen style. Wu Chien Chuen developed the Wu style after learning from the Yang style. Even within the Yang style, Yang Cheng Fu refined the form of his grandfather. Then Professor Cheng Man Ching developed the Simplified 37 *Tàijí* form and my Teacher Huang Sheng Shyan's transition of movements differed from his teacher, Professor Cheng Man Ching. Teacher Huang also developed his own *Tàijí* form, the Refined Simplified Form. Things can be refined but they shouldn't be changed just to be different. If something remains the same for hundreds of years then there is no improvement. If the teachers are always better than their students then that is a tragedy for the art. Teacher Huang once said to me, "When you reach a certain level, you must move out of your teacher's shadow and develop."

When a teacher is willing to give and a student is willing to receive, there is a true teacher/student relationship. However it's only a relationship in name not in the art. It is when the student possesses the skill of the teacher, that they have a relationship in the art. When the student surpasses the skill of the teacher, they are repaying the teacher. The art of *Tàijí* not only requires practice in the art itself but also finding balance in other aspects of your life. I am lucky to have a wonderful family, a supportive wife Janice (Siah Ait Tiang), sons Andy (Inn Siang), Louis (Inn Tze), Jamie (Inn Zheng) and Francis (Inn Yu). I also have a number of great students from different countries, who walk with me on my *Tàijí* journey, sometimes pointing out the scenery that I missed. To be good in the art of *Tàijí*, you must first enjoy it. You must also be honest with yourself and true to the art. As Teacher Huang said, "first and foremost learn how to be a human being".

18. Stories told by Teacher *Huang Sheng Shyan*

The Fujian White Crane Period

Becoming a student of the Fujian White Crane system.

Teacher Huang's mother died from an injury during a feud with a different clan in the village where he lived. As the Huang clan was a minority in the village they were frequently subject to being bullied by others. So, after his mother's death, Teacher Huang decided to take up martial arts.



He first studied under the renowned Fujian White Crane Grandmaster Xie Zhong Xiang in 1924, at the age of 14. At that time Grandmaster Xie was already 74 years old. Realising the potential of his young student, and because of his own advancing age, in 1927 Grandmaster Xie referred Teacher Huang to continue the study of the White Crane system under his senior disciple Ch'en Shih Ting. Teacher Huang had to leave his village in the morning and travel to the village where master Ch'en lived (a couple of hours walk) to train with him. In between the training

periods he had to help to work in the fields and, as the youngest student, he also had to prepare meals for the older students. While the older students were

having their meals, Teacher Huang would do his own training. Quite often after his training when he went back for his meal, he found that the older students had not left much for him. To overcome this problem, every time he had finished prepared the meals, he dished out a full bowl and hid it behind the altar (where the ancestral tablets are placed) to eat it later, after his training.

In 1930, Master Ch'en Shih Ting introduced Teacher Huang to further his study of White Crane under his good friend and renowned White Crane master *P'an Ch'un Lian*. It is also under Master P'an that Teacher Huang begin his study of traditional Chinese medicine and his speciality in bone setting. In 1933, at the age of 23, Teacher Huang decided to travel to Shanghai (the most modern city in China at that time) to see the world and as he put it, to broaden his knowledge.

Time in Shanghai

When he arrived in Shanghai, the locals immediately recognised he was from the countryside by the way he was dressed. Whilst walking to his uncle's house, two men walked either side of him, grabbed him by the arms and pushed him into an alley to try and rob him. Before the two men knew what had happened they were lying on the floor groaning. As Teacher Huang continued to beat them up his Aunt happened to pass by and saw the commotion. She asked him to stop fighting and the two would-be robbers took the opportunity to escape. After explaining to his Aunt what had happened, she replied that Huang should give them a good beating, to which he replied, "I did but you stopped me."

When he was in Shanghai, Teacher Huang made friends with a number of different martial art teachers due to his openness. He exchanged martial art knowledge with them by learning their system and explaining the White Crane system to them. He also started a White Crane school in Shanghai. In those days Shanghai was run by different triads (secret societies) and to run a school there you must have substantial martial skill in order to be respected by other martial schools.

In Shanghai he also heard a case of a very good martial art master getting drunk and being tied up, put into a sack and thrown into a river. That is why he never consumed alcohol himself and he even forbade his students from drinking. He always stressed that drinking caused irresponsible behaviour.

Capture of a Japanese Sergeant

During the occupation of China, Teacher Huang joined a group of guerrillas to fight against the occupying Japanese force. On one occasion they received information that a Japanese patrol would be passing through a certain village, and so Teacher Huang and his men decided to set up an ambush. In the fight that followed, almost all the members of the Japanese patrol were killed except for a sergeant who tried to escape. Teacher Huang chased after the sergeant and caught him after a brief struggle. The other members of the guerrilla group wanted to kill the sergeant, but Teacher Huang stopped them and said, "This man has a family too; we do not kill unless it is absolutely necessary otherwise we are no different from the Japanese." After the war, he met the sergeant again in Taiwan and he was really grateful to Teacher Huang for stopping his men from killing him.

Teacher Huang's first martial art competition

In 1934, at the request of his White Crane teacher, Master P'an Ch'un Nien, he returned to Fuzhou to take part in the all Fujian martial arts competition. In the preliminary round he met an opponent by the name of Chung Sih-Chung, and the bout ended in a draw. Teacher Huang was impressed with Chung's skill and felt they would meet again later in the competition.

In the semi-final, Teacher Huang's opponent was a Master Lee, who was famous for his leg sweep. It is reputed that with one sweep of his leg, he could lift a 100 katties sack of rice off the floor. As expected, in the match Master Lee applied his leg sweeps. The first couple of attempts missed but the third sweep struck Teacher Huang's right leg. Although it did not sweep Teacher Huang off the floor, he did absorb the impact of the sweep. Initially he felt pain in his leg and then later numbness. Although having to fight with an injured leg, Teacher Huang still eventually won. He told me it took him three years of continual treatment to get the swelling of his right leg to go down and for it to completely recover.

In the afternoon of the same day he went into the final, meeting Master Chung whom he had drawn in the preliminary round. Knowing Teacher Huang had an injury to his right leg, Chung continuously tried to attack the injured limb. Huang applied techniques from the Central Frame (a White Crane form) to avoid his attack. The match eventually ended with Master Chung winning the championship by one point and Teacher Huang was the runner up.

The restless young man looking for a fight

This incident occurred when Teacher Huang was about 18 years old. One evening a friend visited him and complained that he had been beaten up by someone in the village. Teacher Huang was forbidden from going out in the evenings by his father. After his friend left, Teacher Huang went to his bedroom to wait for his father to go to bed so he could sneak out to settle the score for his friend. But his father was still sitting in the living room and so, getting restless, he locked his bedroom door and sneaked out through the window. He went to the guy's house, asked him outside and gave him a beating, then came back to his bedroom through the window and went to bed. He told me, "If I hadn't gone and beat the guy up, I probably wouldn't be able to sleep that night," I guess you have to be young and crazy in order to be old and wise!

Founding of Fujian White Crane system according to Teacher Huang

Fang Chee-Niang's mother passed away when she was young. She was very close to her father who was a very proficient Shaolin martial art practitioner and Fang learned the art from him at a young age. When she grew up into a young lady, a rich landlord in the village took notice of her and wanted to take her in as a wife for his son. The landlord proposed to Fang's father who turned down the proposal. Being a martial artist himself, the landlord challenged Fang's father to a duel, such that if Fang's father lost then she must become the daughter-in-law of the landlord. In the duel Fang's father was killed and she was forced to married the landlord's son.

On the wedding night, when Fang's husband forced himself onto her, she fell back and delivered a kick to his throat, killing him instantly. The landlord's family was wealthy and of high status in the village, and so as to not lose face, the landlord ordered the matter to be kept private within the household. Fang Chee-Niang was forced to observe three years of mourning, which was a custom at that time. Knowing that her father-in-law would kill her when the mourning period ended, she put more time into improving her martial art ability. One morning while doing laundry by the river she noticed a crane nearby and she used a rod to try and shove the crane away. As she was shoving the crane she noticed how it was able to avoid her shoving effortlessly. This went on for three months, and during this time she observed the movements of the crane and incorporated them into her martial art practice.

On the morning of the end of the mourning, as she was walking along the corridor of the house, she saw her father-in-law standing in the doorway. She knew the time had come and her father-in-law wanted to take revenge for his son's death. As she was approaching near to her father-in-law, he suddenly struck out at her with his right palm. Fang, using a movement she observed from the crane, stuck to the incoming attack and withdrew. Her father-in-law, on noticing that he had missed, immediately withdrew. Fang, using the momentum of his withdrawal force and her own force, struck her father-in-law on a vital point causing internal injuries which resulted in his death the following day. After the death of her father-in-law, she left the household and became a nun in a temple

As the years passed, there was drought and famine in the village and the landlord's family fell into despair, and even the youngest son of the landlord had to resort to begging. The villagers suggested to him that he should look for his sister-in-law Fang Chee-Niang and learn martial art from her to make a living.

He went to the temple to look for Fang and ask her to impart her martial art knowledge to him. Fang Chee-Niang looked at the desperate state of her youngest brother-in-law and, knowing he was the only member of her husband's family that ever treated her with kindness, she decided to take him in as her first disciple and impart to him the Fujian White Crane system that she had developed.

Tales of two White Crane masters

Master Pei was an official in the government and on his retirement he returned to his village. While he was walking down the path towards his house, a bull that was gazing nearby suddenly charged at him. Master Pei evaded the bull's charge and struck its head with his palm, killing it instantly. When he arrived home, he realised that he had killed his family's bull.

The son of a landlord was walking along the beach with two of his dogs. On the horizon he saw an old man who was also taking a stroll on the beach, so he decided to have some fun and sets his dogs on the old man. When both dogs were jumping onto the old man, he saw him raise both of his arms with a motion as if he was patting the dogs. The dogs lay motionless and the old man calmly walked away. The young man ran to his dogs, only to discover them dead and with all of their teeth broken.

The *Tàijíquán* Period

First meeting with Professor Cheng Man Ching

Through an introduction of a mutual friend, Teacher Huang met Professor Cheng for the first time in 1950. During the meeting, Professor Cheng asked four of his top students to do pushing-hands with Teacher Huang. Because of his White Crane background, Teacher Huang could handle them easily. Professor Cheng, on seeing the ability of Teacher Huang, told him there is no need to study with him as his level of pushing-hands is good.

Second meeting with Professor Cheng

Two weeks later Teacher Huang visited Professor Cheng, and this time he brought along the White Crane book. He showed it to Professor Cheng, and on the first page was written “relax, relax, relax and mind, mind, mind”. After reading the book, Professor Cheng did some pushing-hands with Huang. Teacher Huang was surprised at the subtleness of Professor Cheng, and said it was like pushing into air, as there was nothing there for him to push. At that moment he realised that he had found what he had been looking for, for years. Professor Cheng told Teacher Huang that he would only accept him as a disciple if he agreed not to push or even think of pushing for four years, a condition that Teacher Huang readily accepted. For the next four years Teacher Huang only worked on yielding and neutralising not only with his fellow *Tàijí* students but also with his own White Crane students (he also started to teach his White Crane students *Tàijí*). At the end of the fourth year, on a Sunday class, Professor Cheng installed four poles in his garden and tied a rope around them, to make it into a ring. He told Teacher Huang that today he could push everybody, and he found that he could push everybody more effortlessly than four years ago. The following Sunday the other students of Professor Cheng boycotted the class complaining that Professor Cheng showed favouritism. Professor Cheng replied, “Huang Sheng Shyan listened to me. I asked him not to push for four years and he obeyed me, but you the rest of you didn’t.”

Leading Two Schools into Competition

In 1955, Teacher Huang made history by being a leader of two schools entering the same martial arts competition. He was the leader of Professor Cheng’s *Tàijí* school and also his own White Crane school.

To prepare his White Crane students (who also learned *Tàijí* from him) for the pushing-hands competition, three months before he had devised a training system for them. So for three months, every morning and evening, he and his students would do free pushing-hands on a smooth concrete surface of four feet by four feet, with soapy water poured onto it to make it slippery.

In the second round of the *Tàijí* pushing-hands competition almost all of Professor Cheng’s students were out of the competition. Teacher Huang asked one of his students, Chai Yi Hua, to throw his match so that one of professor’s Cheng students could go into the final round. In the final of the *Tàijí* pushing-hands, Teacher Huang (as Professor Cheng’s student) was declared the champion and two of his students came runner up and third.

On Professor Cheng’s birthday, which was soon after the competition, Professor Cheng’s students who could not believe that they had lost to Teacher Huang’s students, requested a rematch. After the dinner, they pushed hands behind closed doors, but the result was the same. Unfortunately, afterwards one of Teacher Huang’s students made a sarcastic remark towards Professor Cheng’s students. That was considered very disrespectful, especially since Teacher Huang was a student of Professor Cheng, and that according to the lineage custom, meant that Cheng’s *Tàijí* students were uncles to Huang’s White Crane students. So Teacher Huang asked the disrespectful student to leave his school.

At another open martial arts competition, in the first elimination round the organiser had arranged for Teacher Huang to meet with a Master Hong, hoping that Master Hong would eliminate Teacher Huang from the competition. However it turned out that Hong himself was knocked out by Teacher Huang. Teacher Huang later said that it was a pity that he and Hong met in the first round, otherwise Hong would have ended up in the top three

In the final of this open martial arts competition, Teacher Huang’s opponent was a Master Cheng. They fought to a draw in normal time so extra time was required. In extra time, Teacher Huang’s palm touched his feet to stay in balance but the referee ruled that he had touched the floor, so the match was awarded to Master Cheng, with Teacher Huang as the runner up.

Taking up Challenges on Professor Cheng's behalf

Challenge one:

There was a *Tàijí* master called Li who trained in the park of Taipei and often bragged about his skill and belittled Professor Cheng and his students. Professor Cheng, with the help of his friend, decided to set him up with Teacher Huang (without Huang's knowledge). Professor Cheng asked Huang to go to his friend's house and collect an item for him. When he arrived Master Li was also there. Professor Cheng's friend excused himself to go and get the item for Cheng. so that Teacher Huang and Master Li were left alone. Master Li not knowing that Huang was a student of Professor Cheng, Li start to brag about his skill and to criticise both Professor Cheng and his students. In defence of his teacher's honour Huang told Master Li that he was one such student and challenged him. Teacher Huang gave Li a sound beating and in the process destroyed some pieces of furniture and a sliding wooden door. Conceding defeat, Li left and a little while later Professor Cheng's friend returned. The first thing he said was, "Don't worry about the damage, your teacher will pay for it." It was then that Teacher Huang realised that his teacher had set up the challenge. When he went back, Professor Cheng asked "Did you teach Li a lesson?"

Challenge two:

During a gathering of martial artists on the rooftop of a five storey building in Taipei (in Taiwan some rooftops are flat and often converted into use as a training hall for martial art schools), one martial art master from a hard style challenged Professor Cheng. Teacher Huang stepped in and accepted the challenge on his teacher's behalf. In the ensuing contest Teacher Huang nearly knocked the hard style master off the roof, but managed to grab him in the nick of time, preventing him from falling off the roof. After the gathering, Professor Cheng chided Teacher Huang for not letting the hard style master fall. Professor Cheng remarked, "Sheng Shyan, you should have left him fall off the roof, I will take responsibility for the consequence, you won't get into trouble as I know the President (of Taiwan).

The tale of two *Tàijí* masters

An old man with long hair and a long beard was walking along a narrow road. Coming in the opposite direction was a young rider on horseback galloping towards him. The rider was shouting and signalling to the old man to get out of

the way and it seemed that the horse was going to run into him. With the speed of lightning the old man side-stepped and, with a shoulder stroke, sent the horse collapsing on the floor, sending the rider flying into the bushes at the side of the road. The old man was none other than Wang Ts'ung-Yueh, the disciple of Chang Sang Feng.

One day, as the elders in the Chen village were teaching a group of students from the village the Chen family martial art. A stranger passed by and stood there for a moment and observed the class. As he turned around and walked away the stranger giggled. One of the elders in the class heard the giggles and approached the stranger saying, "How dare you giggle at us, are you belittling our martial art?" The stranger shook his head, ignored the elder and started to walk away from him. Without warning the elder lunged forward and attacked the stranger. In the flash of a moment without realising what had hit him, the Chen's elder was propelled off the ground and landed twenty feet away. Realising he had met an exceptional master, the elder knelt down in front of the stranger and begged him to accept him as a disciple. The stranger replied, "I am Jian Fa, disciple of Wang Ts'ung-Yueh, and I have some matters to attend to. I will be coming through this way again in two years' time; perhaps then I will stay in your village to impart the art of *Tàijíquán* to you."

Glossary

<i>àn</i>	(按):	push, forth movement of the grasp the sparrow's tail sequence
<i>bá</i>	(拔):	spread
<i>bǎihui</i>	(百會):	crown meridian point usually referred to as <i>níwán</i> , literal translation: hundred convergences
<i>cǎi</i>	(採):	pluck
<i>chángquán</i>	(長拳):	long fist - early name for <i>tàijíquán</i>
<i>chén</i>	(沉):	sink
<i>dāntián</i>	(丹田):	abdominal meridian point, 3cm below navel, literal translation: centre of elixir
<i>dàlù</i>	(大路):	first moving step pushing-hands routine, literal meaning: big path
<i>dǒngjìn</i>	(懂勁):	understanding energy
<i>duì</i>	(兌):	western trigram, element: swamp or lake
<i>fājìn</i>	(發勁):	discharge/release relaxed force
<i>fàngsōng</i>	(放鬆):	let go / release
<i>gēn</i>	(根):	base / joints
<i>gōngfū</i>	(功夫)	literally: deep understanding - common reference to Chinese martial arts and often romanised as kung fu
<i>hán</i>	(含):	contain - not reveal
<i>hū</i>	(呼):	breathe
<i>huìyīn</i>	(會陰):	perineum meridian point between anus and scrotum/vulva, literal translation: meeting of <i>yīn</i>
<i>jí</i>	(極):	ultimate

<i>jǐ</i>	(擠):	press, third movement of the grasp the sparrow's tail sequence
<i>jiē jìn</i>	(接勁):	receiving energy
<i>jìn</i>	(勁):	relaxed force
<i>jīng</i>	(精):	essence
<i>jīnglù</i>	(精路):	meridians, energy pathways
<i>kǎn</i>	(坎):	northern trigram, element: water
<i>kào</i>	(靠):	lean-on
<i>kuà</i>	(胯):	hips
<i>kūn</i>	(坤):	southwestern trigram, element: earth
<i>láo gōng</i>	(勞宮):	palm meridian point where third finger touches when hand clenched, literal translation: work palace
<i>lí</i>	(離):	southern trigram, element: fire
<i>lí</i>	(厘):	Chinese 'Old System' unit of measurement, a <i>lí</i> approximates to 576m and thousandth part of a <i>tael</i>
<i>lì</i>	(力):	brute strength
<i>lián</i>	(連):	connect
<i>liè</i>	(捌):	split
<i>lǚ</i>	(擻):	roll-back, second movement of the grasp the sparrow's tail sequence
<i>mìng mén</i>	(命門):	lower spine meridian point between 2nd and 3rd lumbar vertebrae, literal translation: life entrance
<i>nián</i>	(黏):	adhere
<i>ní wán</i>	(泥丸):	crown of head meridian point sometimes referred to as <i>bǎi huì</i> , literal translation: mud pill
<i>péng</i>	(棚):	ward-off, first movement of the grasp the sparrow's tail sequence
<i>qì</i>	(氣):	energy, vigour
<i>quán</i>	(拳):	fist / boxing
<i>qián</i>	(乾):	northwestern trigram, element: heaven
<i>rén</i>	(人):	front mid-line meridian, literal translation: person / man
<i>shén</i>	(神):	spirit
<i>shén míng</i>	(神明):	enlightenment / spiritual clarity
<i>shuāng zhòng</i>	(雙重):	equal heaviness
<i>sǐ</i>	(死):	dead

<i>shí</i>	(實):	substantial/full
<i>suí</i>	(隨):	follow
<i>tàijíquán</i>	(太極拳):	grand ultimate boxing
<i>tiē</i>	(貼):	stick
<i>tīng jìn</i>	(聽經):	listening energy
<i>tuī shǒu</i>	(推手):	pushing-hands
<i>wěi lǚ</i>	(尾閭):	coccyx meridian point, literal translation: tail gate
<i>wú wéi</i>	(無偽):	non action / natural process
<i>xiǎo lù</i>	(小路):	second moving step pushing-hands routine, literal translation: small path
<i>xīn</i>	(心):	heart/conscience
<i>xū</i>	(虛):	insubstantial/empty
<i>xùn</i>	(巽):	southeastern trigram, element: wind
<i>yāo</i>	(腰):	waist
<i>yáng</i>	(陽):	male principle: expansive
<i>yì</i>	(意):	mind intention
<i>yīn</i>	(陰):	female principle: recessive
<i>yǒng quán</i>	(湧泉):	sole meridian point, in depression between pads of 2nd and 3rd toes, literal translation: bubbling well
<i>yù zhěn</i>	(玉枕):	occipital meridian point, literal translation: jade pillow
<i>zhèn</i>	(震):	eastern trigram, element: thunder
<i>zhōng zhèng</i>	(中正):	central equilibrium
<i>zhǒu</i>	(肘):	elbow-strike

Note: *Tael* and *catty* are ancient Chinese units to measure weight. 16 *taels* equal one *catty* (one *tael* is equals approximately 15 grams), and one *catty* equals approximately 240 grams).

